THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

SEPT.
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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Bulldog Drummond at Lonely Inn
by H. C. McNEILE

The Screaming Woman
by RAY BRADBURY

The Case of the Button
by T. S. STRIBLING

The Unloaded Gun
by EDMUND CRISPIN

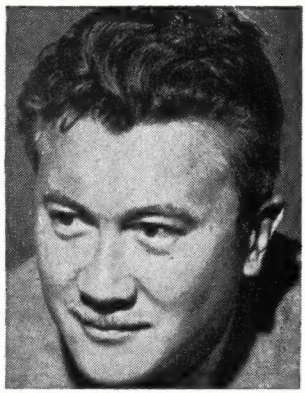
The Mixture As Before
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

MURDER AT THE RACE TRACK

A New Johnny Fletcher Novelet by FRANK GRUBER

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A [illegible] SIZE PUBLICATION



OF THE SELECT ROSTER of what I call the Old Pros among modern writers, Frank Gruber is certainly one of the most versatile. For more years than his looks would hint at, he had written everything from historical romances to movie thrillers to Westerns, all with the same deceptively easy-looking dexterity. To be able to do all that, a guy has to have a pretty encyclopedic brain on top of his basic craftsmanship. So it may not be so surprising that Mr. Gruber's most popular creation in the mystery field is a fellow named Johnny Fletcher, who not only peddles books for a living but solves crimes that are so happily committed in his vicinity.

Hitherto the Johnny Fletcher stories have only been available in book-length form. MURDER AT THE RACE TRACK is his very first appearance in the shorter length, and we are mighty pleased to have it for our star attraction in this issue.

Ray Bradbury is another brilliant light among those versatile lads who make your Editor ruefully conscious of his own limitations; and more than that, Bradbury is one of the few writers at work today who believes in making music out of his language, and who has the vocabulary and the poetic power to do it. THE SCREAMING WOMAN is that offbeat Bradbury at his lyrical smoothest.

Sometimes I wish that this page could be printed in narrow vertical columns, Chinese style, so that half a dozen names could be at that top. Surely *another* brand-new Poggioli story by T. S. Stribling ought to be one of the first things I'd shout about. And it takes all this time to get in a word about it. Title: THE CASE OF THE BUTTON. Grade: AAA.

And if you won't think we're going highbrow, THE UNLOADED GUN, by Edmund Crispin, is another erudite and professorial item, in the best urbane English tradition. But it's also witty and exciting enough to give a lift to the most jaded reader.

H. C. McNeile, who liked to be known by the pseudonym of "Sapper" (which, in case you were wondering, happens to be the popular name for the Engineers of the British Army, of which he was a member when he started writing during World War I) is another English name of only less renown than his immortal character Bulldog Drummond, who was one of the very first, and one of the most charming, of modern fiction's gentleman adventurers. AT LONELY INN is one of the rare short stories about him.

Another fairly notorious gentleman adventurer, known as the Saint, appears in a bit called THE MIXTURE AS BEFORE. Almost sounds like a summary of this issue.

Cleve Cartmill

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THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, Vol. 4, No. 3. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y.
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Names to conjure with are scattered throughout all issues, for the stories are by the most famous writers of mystery, crime and detective fiction in the world—such greats as: Leslie Charteris, Ben Ames Williams, William Faulkner, Ben Hecht, Craig Rice, Philip Wylie, William Irish, H. G. Wells, Damon Runyon, Octavus Roy Cohen, Sax Rohmer, T. S. Stribling, Clarence Budington Kelland, Dorothy L. Sayers, Hugh Wiley, Ellery Queen, Agatha Christie, Ray Bradbury, Graham Greene, Brett Halliday, P. G. Wodehouse, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Edgar Wallace, Mignon G. Eberhart, Hugh Walpole, Q. Patrick, Cornell Woolrich, G. K. Chesterton, Hugh Pentecost, Leslie Ford, Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas Walsh, MacKinlay Kantor, Rufus King, Peter Cheyney, George Fielding Eliot, Fredric Brown, and many, many others.

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the mixture as before

by . . . Leslie Charteris

From time immemorial honest men and rascals have tried to make diamonds—and failed. But Simon Templar had a method all his own!

"CRIME," explained Simon Templar, squeezing lemon-juice meditatively over a liberal slice of smoked salmon, "is a kind of Fourth Dimension. The sucker moves and has his being completely enclosed in a sphere of limitations which he assumes to be the natural laws of the universe. When he is offered an egg, he expects to be given an egg—not a sewing machine. The lad who takes the money off him is the lad who breaks the rules—the lad who hops outside the sucker's dimension, skids invisibly round ahead of him, and pops in again exactly at the point where the sucker would never dream of looking for him.

"But the lad who takes money off the lad who takes money off the sucker—the real aristocrat of the profession—is something even brighter. He duly delivers the egg; only it's also an aubergine. It's a plant."

The Saint could have continued in the same strain for some time, and not infrequently did.

Those moods of contemplative contentment were an integral part of Simon Templar's

THE MOST NIMBLE-WITTED OF LONDON'S WICKED SCALAWAGS TANGLES WITH THE SAINT IN A CRIME RIOTOUSLY FAMOUS.

Copyright, 1934, by Leslie Charteris
From THE SAINT INTERVENES. Published by Doubleday & Co., Inc.

enjoyment of life, the restful twilights between buccaneering days and adventurous nights. They usually came upon him when the second glass of dry sherry had been tasted and found good, when the initial delicacy of a chain of fastidiously chosen dishes had been set before him, and the surroundings of white linen and gleaming silver and glass had sunk into their proper place as the background of that epicurean luxuriousness which to him was the goal of all worthwhile piracy. Those were the occasions on which the corsair put off his harness and discoursed on the philosophy of filibustering.

It was a subject of which Simon Templar never tired. In the course of a flamboyant career which had been largely devoted to equalizing what he had always considered to be a fundamentally unjust distribution of wealth he had developed many theories about his own chosen field of art; and these he was always ready to expound. It was at such times as this that the Saint's keen dark head took on its most challenging alertness of line, the mocking blue eyes danced with their gayest humor . . . when everything about him matched the irresponsible spirit of his nickname except the technical morality of his discourse.

"Successful crime," said the Saint, "is simply the Art of the Unexpected."

LOUIS FALLON had similar ideas, although he was no philosopher. The finer abstractions of lawlessness left Louie not only cold but in a condition to make ice cream shiver merely by breathing on it. Neither were Louie's interpretations of those essential ideas particularly novel; but he was a very sound practitioner.

"It's a waste of time tryin' to think up new stunts, Ollie," Louie declared, "while there's all the suckers you want still fallin' for the old ones. Anyone with a good uncut diamond can draw a dividend from it every day."

"Anyone who can put down two thousand pounds can have a good uncut diamond, Louie," replied Mr. Olomo, sympathetic but cautious.

"Anyone who could put down two thousand quid could float a company and swindle people like a gentleman," said Louie.

Mr. Olomo shook his head sadly. His business was patronized by a small and exclusive clientele which was rarely in a position to bargain with him.

"That's a pity, Louie. I like to see a good man get on."

"Now listen to me, you old shark," said Louie amiably. "I want a diamond, a real high-class bit of ice, and all I can afford is three hundred pounds. Look over your stock and see what you can find. And make it

snappy. I want to get started this week."

"Three hundred pounds is for a cheap bit of paste," said Mr. Olomo pathetically. "You know I haven't got anything like that in my shop, Louie."

Half an hour later he parted grudgingly with an excellent stone, for which Louie Fallon was persuaded to pay two hundred pounds, and the business-like tension of the interview relaxed in an exchange of cheap cigars. In the estimation of Mr. Olomo, who had given seventy pounds for the stone, it was a highly satisfactory afternoon's work.

"You got a gift there, Louie," he said gloomily.

"I've got a gold-mine," said Louie confidently. "All I need beside this is psychology, and I don't have to pay for that. I'm just naturally psychological. You got to pick out the right kind of sucker. Then it goes like this."

The germ of that elusive quality which turns an otherwise normal and rational human being into a sucker has yet to be isolated. Louie Fallon, the man of action, had never bothered to probe into it.

He recognized one when he saw one, without analyzing whys and wherefores, exactly as he was accustomed to recognizing a piece of cheese without a thought of the momentous dawn of life which it enshrines. Simon Templar himself had various theories.

Probably the species Sucker is the same as the common cold—there is no single virus to account for it. Nor is there likely to be any rigid definition of that precise shade of covetous innocence, that peculiarly grasping guilelessness, which stamps the hard-boiled West Country farmer, accustomed to prying into the pedigrees of individual oats before disgorging a penny on them, as a potential purchaser of the Tower of London for five hundred pounds down and the balance by installments.

But whatever these symptoms may be, Simon Templar possessed them in their richest beauty. He had only to saunter in his most natural manner down the highways of the world, immaculate and debonair, with his soft hat slanted blithely over one eye, and the passing pageant of humanity crystallized into men who had had their pockets picked and only needed five shillings to get home, men with gold bricks, men with oil wells in Texas, men needing assistance in the execution of eccentric wills, men with charts showing the authenticated cemetery of Captain Kidd's treasure, men with horses that could romp home on one leg and a crutch, and men who just thought he might like a game of cards.

It was one of the Saint's most

treasured assets; and he never ordered strawberries in December without a toast to the benign Providence that had endowed him with the gift of having all that he asked of life poured into his lap.

As a matter of fact he was sauntering down the Strand when he met Louie Fallon. He didn't actually run into him, but he did walk into him. There was nothing particularly remarkable about that, for the Strand is a street which contains more crooks to the square yard than any other area of ground outside a prison wall—which may be partly accounted for by the fact that it also has the reputation of being the favorite promenading ground of more potential suckers than any other thoroughfare in London.

Louie Fallon had a theory that he couldn't walk down the Strand on any day in the week without bumping into a perambulating gold-mine which only required skillful scratching to yield him its gilded harvest.

He walked towards the Saint, fumbling in his pockets with a preoccupied air and the kind of flurried abstraction of a man who has forgotten where he put his railway ticket on his way down the platform, with his eyes fluttering over every item of the perspective except those which were included in the direction in which he was going.

At any rate, the last person in the panorama whom he appeared to see was the Saint himself. Simon saw him, and swerved politely. But with the quick-witted agility of long practice, Louie Fallon blundered off to the same side. They collided with a slight bump, at the very moment when Louie had apparently discovered the article for which he had been searching.

It fell on to the pavement between them and rolled away between the Saint's feet, sparkling enticingly in the sunlight. Muttering profuse apologies, Louie scuffled round to retrieve it. The movement was so adroitly devised to entangle them that Simon would have had no chance to pass on and make his escape, even if he had wanted to.

But it is dawning—slowly and reluctantly, perhaps, but dawning, nevertheless — upon the chronicler that there can be very few students of these episodes who can still be cherishing any delusion that the Saint would ever want to escape from such a situation.

Simon stood by with a slight smile coming to his lips, while Louie wriggled round his legs and recovered his precious possession with a faint squeak of delight, and straightened up with the object clutched solidly in his hand.

"Phew!" said Mr. Fallon, fanning himself with his hat. "That

was near enough. Did you see where it went? Right to the edge of that grating. If it had rolled down . . ." He blew out his cheeks and rolled up his eyes in an eloquent register of horror at the dreadful thought. "For a moment I thought I'd lost it," he said, clarifying his point conclusively.

Simon nodded. It did not require any peculiar keenness of vision to see that the object of so much concern was a very nice-looking diamond, for Louie was making no attempt to hide it—he was, on the contrary, blowing on it and rubbing it affectionately on his sleeve to remove the invisible specks of grime and dust which it had collected on its travels.

"You must be lucky."

Louie's face fell abruptly. The transition between his almost childish delight and the shadow of awful gloom which suddenly passed across his countenance was quite startling. Mr. Fallon's artistry had never been disputed even by his rivals in the profession.

"Lucky?" he practically yelped in a rising crescendo of mournful indignation. "Why, I'm the unluckiest man that ever lived!"

"Too bad," said the Saint, with profound sympathy.

"Lucky!" repeated Mr. Fallon, with all the pained disgust of a hypochondriac who has been accused of looking well. "Why, I'm the sort of fellow if I saw a five-pound note lying in the street and tried to pick it up, I'd fall down and break my neck!"

It was becoming clear to Simon Templar that Mr. Fallon felt that he was unlucky.

"There are people like that," the Saint said, reminiscently. "I remember an aunt of mine—"

"Lucky?" reiterated Mr. Fallon, who did not appear to be interested in anyone else's aunt. "Why, right at this moment I'm the unluckiest man in London. Look here"—he clasped the Saint by the arm with the pathetically appealing movement of a drowning man clutching at a straw—"do you think you could help me? If you haven't got anything particular to do? I feel sort of—well—you look the sort of fellow who might have some ideas. Have you got time for a drink?"

Simon Templar could never have been called a toper, but on such occasions as this he invariably had time for a drink.

"I don't mind if I do," he said obligingly.

As a matter of fact, they were standing outside a miraculously convenient hostel at that moment, for Louie Fallon had always believed in bringing the mellowing influence of alcohol to bear as soon as he had scraped his acquaintance, and he staged his encounters with that idea in view.

With practiced dexterity he steered the Saint towards the door of the saloon bar, cutting short the protest which Simon Templar had no intention whatsoever of making. In hardly any more time than it takes to record, he had got the Saint inside the bar, parked him at a table, invited him to name his poison, procured a double ration of the said poison from the barmaid, and settled himself in the adjoining chair to improve the shining hour.

To the discerning critic it might seem that he rushed at the process rather like an unleashed investor plunging after an absconding company promoter. But Louie Fallon's conception of improving shining hours had never included any unnecessary waste of time, and he had learnt by experience that the willingness of a Pigeon to listen is usually limited only by the ability of the prospective Plucker to talk.

"Yes," said Mr. Fallon, reverting to his subject. "I am the unluckiest man you are ever likely to meet. Did you see that diamond I dropped just now?"

"Well," admitted the Saint truthfully, "I couldn't help seeing it."

Mr. Fallon nodded. He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, brought out the jewel again, and laid it on the table.

"I made that myself," he said.

Simon eyed the stone and Mr. Fallon with the puzzled expression which was expected of him.

"What do you mean—you made it?"

"I made it myself," said Mr. Fallon. "It's what you would call synthetic. It took about half an hour, and it cost me exactly threepence. But there isn't a diamond merchant in London who could prove that it wasn't dug up out of the ground in South Africa. Take it to anyone you like, and see if he doesn't swear that it's a perfectly genuine stone."

"You mean it's a fake?" said the Saint.

"Fake my eye!" said Mr. Fallon, with emphatic if inelegant expressiveness. "It's a perfectly genuine diamond, the same as any other stone you'll ever see. The only difference is that I made it. You know how diamonds are made?"

The Saint had as good an idea of how diamonds are made as Louie Fallon was ever likely to have. But it seemed as if Louie liked talking, and in such circumstances as that Simon Templar was the last man on earth to interfere with anyone's enjoyment. He shook his head blankly.

"I thought they sort of grew," he said vaguely.

"I don't know that I should put it exactly like that," said Louie. "I'll tell you how diamonds happen. Diamonds are

just carbon—like coal, or soot, or—or—"

"Paper?" suggested the Saint helpfully.

Louie frowned. "They're carbon," he said, "which is crystallized under pressure. When the earth was all sort of hot, like you read about in your history books—before it sort of cooled down and people started to live in it and things grew on it—there was a lot of carbon. Being hot, it burnt things, and when you burn things you usually get carbon. Well, after a time, when the earth started to cool down, it sort of shrunk, like—like—"

"A shirt when it goes to the wash?" said the Saint.

"Anyway, it shrunk," said Louie, yielding the point and passing on. "And what happened then?"

"It got smaller," hazarded the Saint.

"It caused terrific pressure," said Mr. Fallon firmly. "Just imagine it. Thousands of millions of tons of rock—and—"

"And rock."

"And rock, cooling down, and shrinking up, and getting hard. Well, naturally, any bits of carbon that were floating around in the rock got squeezed. So what happened?" demanded Louie, triumphantly reaching the climax of his lucid description.

He paused dramatically, and the Saint wondered whether he was expected to offer any serious solution to the riddle. Before he had really made up his mind, Mr. Fallon was solving the problem for him.

"I'll tell you what happened," said Mr. Fallon impressively, leaning over into a strategic position in which he could tap the Saint on the shoulder. Once again he paused, but there was no doubt that this hiatus at least was motivated solely by the requirements of theatrical suspense. *"Diamonds!"* said Mr. Fallon, with an air of patronizing pride, which almost suggested that he personally had been responsible for the event.

The Saint took a draught from his glass, and gazed at him with that air of slightly perplexed awe which was one of the most precious assets in his infinitely varied stock of facial expressions. It was a gaze pregnant with so much ingenuous interest, such naive wonder and curiosity, that Mr. Fallon felt the cockles of his heart warming to a temperature at which, on a cold day, he would be tempted to dispense with his overcoat. Since he was not wearing an overcoat, he gave rein to his emotions by insisting that he should stand another round of drinks.

"Yes," he resumed, when he had refilled their glasses. "Diamonds. And that's how I make them—not," he admitted modestly, "that I mean I make the

earth go hot and then cool down again. But I do the same thing on a smaller scale."

The Saint knitted his brows. It was the most ostentatious sign of a functioning brain that he could permit himself in the part he was playing.

"Now you tell me, I think I have heard something like that before," he said. "Hasn't somebody else done the same thing—I mean made synthetic diamonds by cooling chunks of iron under pressure?"

"I did hear of something on those lines," confessed Mr. Fallon magnanimously. "But the process wasn't very good. They could only make very small diamonds that weren't worth anything in the market and cost ten times as much as real ones. I make 'em with things that you can buy in any chemist's shop for a few pennies. I don't even need a proper laboratory. I could make 'em in your bathroom."

He drank, wiped his lips, and looked at the Saint suddenly with bright plaintive eyes. "You don't believe me," he said accusingly.

"Why—yes, of course I do," protested the Saint, changing his expression with a guilty start.

Mr. Fallon continued to shake his head. "No, you don't," he insisted morbidly, "and I can't blame you. I know it sounds like a tall story. But I'm not a liar."

"Of course not," agreed the Saint hastily.

"I'm not a liar," insisted Mr. Fallon lingeringly, as if he was simply aching to be called one. "Anyone who calls me a liar is goin' to have to eat his words."

He was silent for a moment, while the idea appeared to develop in his mind; and then he slued around in his seat abruptly, and tapped the Saint on the shoulder again.

"Look here—I'll prove it to *you*. You're a friendly sort—we ran into each other just now as perfect strangers, and now here you are havin' a drink with me. I don't know whether you believe in coincidences," said Louie, waxing metaphysical, "but you might be the very fellow I'm lookin' for. I like a chap who isn't too damned standoffish to have a drink with another chap without being introduced, and when I like a chap there isn't a limit to what I wouldn't mind doin' for him. Why, you might be the very chap. Well, what d'you say?"

"I didn't say anything," said the Saint innocently.

"What d'you say I prove to you that I can make diamonds? If you can spare half an hour—it wouldn't take much more than that and you might find it interesting. Are you game?"

Simon Templar was game. To put it perhaps a trifle crudely, such occasions as this found him

so game that a two-year-old pheasant would have had to rise exceedingly high to catch him. Life, he felt, was still very much worth living while blokes like Louie Fallon were almost falling over themselves with eagerness to call you a Chap. To follow up the metaphor with which he was allowed to open this episode, he considered that Mr. Fallon was certainly doing an impressive line of clucking, and he was profoundly interested to find out exactly what brand of egg would be the fruit thereof.

Mr. Fallon, it appeared, was the proud tenant of an apartment in one of those streets running down between the Tivoli and the River which fall roughly within the postal address known as "Adelphi" because it sounds so much better than W. C. The rooms were expensively and tastefully furnished, and the Saint surmised that Louie had not furnished them. Somewhere in London there would be an outraged landlord looking for his rent—and perhaps also the more valuable of his rented chattels—when Mr. Fallon had finished with the premises; but this was not immediately Simon Templar's concern.

He followed Louie into the living-room, where a bottle of whiskey and two glasses were produced and suitably dealt with, and cheerfully prepared to continue with the role of open-mouthed listener which the situation demanded of him. This called for no very fatiguing effort, for the role of open-mouthed listener was one in which the Saint had perfected himself more years ago than he could easily remember.

"I told you I could make my diamonds in a bathroom," said Louie, "and that's exactly what I am doin' at the moment."

He led the way onwards, glass in hand, and Simon followed him good-humoredly. It was quite a swanky bathroom, with a green marble bath and generous windows looking out over rows of smoke-stained housetops towards the Thames.

The materials that Louie Fallon used in making his chemical experiments were the only incongruous note in it. These consisted of an ancient and shabby marble-topped washstand, which had obviously started its new lease of life in a second-hand sale room, a fireproof crucible on a metal tripod, and a litter of test-tubes, burners, bottles and other paraphernalia which Simon did not deny were most artistically arranged.

"Just to show you," said Mr. Fallon generously, "I'll make a diamond for you now."

He went over to the washstand and picked up one of the bottles. "Magnesium," he said. He picked up another bottle. "Iron filings," he said. He picked up a

third bottle and tipped a larger quantity of grayish powder on top of what he had taken from the first two, stirring the mixture on the marble table-top with a commonplace Woolworth teaspoon. "And the last thing," he said, "is the actual stuff that I make my diamonds with."

He picked up the crucible and held it below the level of the table, scraped his little mound of assorted powders into it, and turned around with a didactic air.

"Now I'll tell you what happens," he said. "When you burn magnesium with iron filings you produce a temperature of thousands of degrees Fahrenheit. It isn't quite as hot as the earth was when it was all molten, but it's nearly as hot. That melts the iron filings; and it also fuses the other mixture I put in which is exactly the same chemically as the stuff that diamonds are made of."

He struck a match and applied it to the crucible. There was a sudden spurt of eye-achingly brilliant flame, accompanied by a faint hissing sound. Simon could feel the intense heat of the flare on his cheeks, even though he was standing several feet away; and he watched the crucible becoming incandescent before his eyes, turning from a dull red through blazing pink to a blinding white glow.

"So there," said Mr. Fallon, gazing at his fireworks with almost equally incandescent pride, "you have the heat. Right now that diamond powder is wrappin' itself up inside the melted iron filings. The mixture isn't quite as hot as it ought to be, because nobody has discovered how to produce as much heat as there was in the world back in those times when it was molten.

"We have to make up for that by coolin' the thing off quicker. That's the reason why all the other experimenters have failed. They've never been able to cool things off quick enough. But I got over that."

From under the washstand he dragged out a gadget which the Saint had not noticed before. To the callously uninitiated eye it might have looked rather like a couple of old oil-cans and some bits of battered gaspipe; but Louie handled it as tenderly as an anarchist exhibiting his favorite bomb.

"This is the fastest cooler that's ever been made," he said. "I won't try to tell you how it works, because you probably wouldn't understand, but it's very scientific. When I throw this nugget that's forming in the crucible into it it'll be cooled off quicker than anything's ever been cooled off before. From four thousand degrees Fahrenheit down to a hundred below zero, in less than half a second! Have you any idea what that means?"

Simon realized that it was time

for him to show some rudimentary intelligence.

"I know," he said slowly. "It means—"

"It means," said Mr. Fallon, taking the words out of his mouth, "that you get a pressure of thousands of millions of tons inside that nugget of molten iron; and when you break it open the diamond's inside."

He lifted the lid of his oil-can contraption, picked up the crucible with a pair of long iron tongs, and poured out a blob of luminous liquid metal the size of a small pear. There was a loud fizzing noise accompanied by a great burst of steam; and Louie replaced the lid of his cooler and looked at the Saint triumphantly through the fog.

"Now," he said, "in half a minute you'll see it with your own eyes."

The Saint opened his cigarette-case and tapped a cigarette thoughtfully on his thumbnail.

"How on earth did you hit on that?" he asked, with wide-eyed admiration.

"I used to be an assistant in a chemist's shop when I was a boy," said Louie casually.

As a matter of fact, this was perfectly true, but he did not mention that his employment had terminated abruptly when the chemist discovered that his assistant had been systematically whittling down the contents of the till whenever he was left alone in the shop.

"I always liked playin' around with things and tryin' experiments, and I always believed it'd be possible to make perfectly good synthetic diamonds whatever the other experts said. And now I've proved it."

This also, curiously enough, was partly true. Improbable as it may seem, Mr. Fallon had his dreams—dreams in which he could produce unlimited quantities of gold or diamonds simply by mixing chemicals together in a pail, or vast stacks of genuine paper money merely by turning a handle.

The psychologist, delving into Louie's dream-life, would probably have found the particular form of swindle which Mr. Fallon had made his own inexorably predestined by these curiously childish fantasies—a kind of spurious and almost self-defensive satisfaction of a congenital urge for easy money.

He rolled up his sleeves and plunged his bare arms into the cooling gadget with the rather wistful expression which he always wore when performing that part of his task. When he stood up again he was clutching a round gray stone glistening with water; and for a moment or two he gazed at it dreamily.

It was at this stage of the proceedings that Louie's histrionics invariably ran away

with him—when, for two or three seconds, his imagination really allowed him to picture himself as the exponent of an earth-shaking scientific discovery, the genuine result of those futile experiments on which he had spent so much of his time and so much of the money which he had earned from the sham.

"There you are," he said. "There's your diamond—and any dealer in London would be glad to buy it. Here—take it yourself." He pressed the wet stone into Simon Templar's hand. "Show it to anyone you like, and if there's a dealer in London who wouldn't be glad to pay two hundred quid for it, I'll give you a thousand pounds. You can't say I'm not being fair."

He picked up his glass again; and then, as if he had suddenly remembered the essential tone of his story, his face recovered its expression of uncontrollable gloom. "And I'm the unhappiest man in the world," he said lugubriously.

Simon raised his eyebrows.

"But good God!" he objected. "How on earth can you be unhappy if you can turn out a two-hundred-pound diamond every half hour?"

Louie shook his head. "Because I haven't a chance to spend the money," he replied.

He led the way back dejectedly into the living-room and threw himself into a chair, thoughtfully refilling his glass before he did so.

"You see," he said, when Simon Templar had taken the chair opposite him with his glass also refilled. "A thing like this has got to be handled properly. It's no good my just making diamonds and trying to sell them. I might get away with one or two, but if I brought a sackful of them into a shop and tried to sell 'em the buyer would start to wonder whether I was trying to get rid of some illicit stuff. He'd want to ask all sorts of questions about where I got 'em, and as likely as not he'd call in the police. And what does that mean?

"It means that either I've got to say nothing and probably get taken for a crook and put in prison—" Louie's features registered profound horror at this frightful possibility. "Or else I've got to give away my secret. And if I said that I made the diamonds myself, they'd want me to prove it; and if I proved it, everybody would know it could be done, and the bottom would fall out of the diamond market. If people knew that anybody could make diamonds for threepence a time, diamonds just wouldn't be worth anything any more. People only want what's scarce, you see."

Simon nodded. The argument was logical and provided a very intriguing impasse. He waited

for Mr. Fallon to point the way out.

"What this thing needs," said Louie, duly coming up to expectations, "is someone to run it in a businesslike way. It's got to be scientific just like the way the diamonds are made." Mr. Fallon had worked all this out for himself in his daydreams, and the recital was mechanically easy. "Someone would have to go off somewhere—not to South Africa, because that's too much controlled, but to South America maybe—and do some prospectin'.

"After a while he'd report that he'd found diamonds, and set up a mine. We'd set up a company and sell shares to the public, and after a bit the diamonds'd start comin' home and they could all be sold in the regular market quite legitimate."

"Why don't you do that?" inquired the Saint perplexedly.

"I've got no heart for it," said Louie with a sigh. "I'm not so young as I was; and besides, I never had any kind of head for these things. And I don't want to do it. I don't want to get myself tied up in a lot of business worries and office work. I've had that all my life. I want to enjoy myself—travel around and meet some girls and have a good time. Between you and I," said Mr. Fallon with a catch in his voice, and tears glistening in his eyes, "the doctors tell me that I haven't long to live. I've had a hard life, and I want to make the best of what I have got left. Now, if I had a young fellow like yourself to help me . . ."

He leaned further back in his chair, with his eyes half-closed, and went on as if talking to himself: "It'd have to be a chap who could keep his mouth shut, a chap who wouldn't mind doing a bit of hard work for a lot of money—someone that I could just leave to manage everything while I went off and had a good time. He'd have to have a bit of money of his own to invest in the company, just to make everything square and aboveboard and legal, and in a year or so he'd be a millionaire ridin' around in a Rolls Royce with chauffeurs and everything.

"You'd think it'd be easy to find a fellow like that, but it isn't. There aren't many chaps that I take a likin' to—not chaps that I feel I could trust with anything as big as this. That's why when I took a fancy to you, I wondered . . ." Mr. Fallon sighed again, a sigh of heart-rending self-pity. "But I suppose it's no use. Here am I with the greatest discovery in modern science, and I can't do anything with it. I suppose I was just born unlucky, like I told you."

The Saint was sublimely sure that Louie Fallon was unlucky, but he did not dream of saying so. He allowed his face to be-

come illuminated with a light of breathless cupidity which was everything that Mr. Fallon had desired.

"Well," he said hesitantly, "if you've really taken a fancy to me and I can do anything to help you—"

Louie stared at him for a moment incredulously, as if he had never dared to hope that such a miracle could happen.

"No," he said at length, covering his eyes wearily, "it couldn't be true. My luck can't have changed. You wouldn't do a thing like that for a perfect stranger."

During the conversation that followed, however, it appeared that Louie's luck had indeed changed. His new-found friend, it seemed, was quite prepared to do such a service for a perfect stranger. They talked for another hour, discussing ways and means, and occasionally referring in a gentlemanly way to terms of business; then they went out to lunch in an aura of mutual admiration and regard, and discussed the fortunes which they would assist each other to make. And when they finally separated, the Saint had agreed to meet Mr. Fallon again the following day, bringing with him—in cash—the sum of four thousand pounds which he was to invest in the new industry, on an equal partnership basis, as a guarantee of his good faith.

Simon went off with Louie Fallon's diamond in his pocket. As a purely precautionary measure, he took it to a diamond merchant of his acquaintance who pronounced it to be unquestionably genuine; and then he proceeded somewhat lightheadedly to make some curious purchases.

The clouds of ill-starred melancholy seemed to have dispersed themselves from Mr. Fallon's sky overnight; for when he opened the door to Simon Templar the next day he was beaming. The flat, Simon noticed, was in some disorder, and there were three freshly-labeled suitcases standing in the hall.

"I hope I'm not late," said the Saint anxiously.

"Only a minute or two," said Louie heartily. "It's my own fault that it seems longer. I was just nervous. I guess I couldn't believe that my luck had really changed, until I saw you on the step. You see, I've got my tickets and everything. I'm ready to go as soon as everything's fixed up."

The Saint believed him. As soon as everything had been fixed up in the way Louie intended, Mr. Fallon would be likely to go as fast and far as the conveniences of modern travel would take him. Simon made vague noises of sympathy and encouragement, and followed his benefactor into the living-room.

"There's the contract, all drawn up already," said Louie, producing a large and impressive-looking document with fat red seals attached to it. "All you've got to do is to sign on the dotted line and put in your capital, and you're in charge of the whole business. After that, if you send me two or three hundred pounds a week out of the profits, I'll be quite happy, and I don't much care what you do with the rest."

With all the eagerness that was expected of him, Simon sat down at the table, glanced over the document, and signed his name over the dotted line as requested. Then he took out his wallet and counted out a sheaf of crisp new banknotes; and Louie picked them up and counted them again with slightly unsteady fingers.

"Well, now," said the Saint, "if that's all settled, hadn't you better show me your process?"

"I've written it all out for you—"

"Oh, yes, I'd want that. But couldn't we try it over now just to make sure that I understand it properly?"

"Certainly, my dear chap—certainly." Mr. Fallon pushed up his sleeve to look at his watch, and appeared to make a calculation. "I don't know whether I'll have time to see the experiment right through to the end, but once you've got it started you can't possibly go wrong. It's absolutely fool-proof. Come along."

They went into the bathroom and Simon poured out magnesium and iron filings into the crucible exactly as he had seen Louie doing the previous day. The composition of the powder from which the diamonds were actually made gave him more trouble. It was apparently made up of the contents of various other unlabeled bottles, mixed up in certain complicated proportions.

It was at this stage in the proceedings that the Saint appeared to become unexpectedly stupid and clumsy. He poured out too much from one bottle and spilt most of the contents of another on the floor.

"You'll have to be more careful than that," said Louie, pursing his lips, "but I can see you've got the idea. Well, now, if I'm goin' to catch my train—"

"I'd like to finish the job," said the Saint, "even if the mixture has gone wrong. After all, I may as well know if there are any other mistakes I'm likely to make." He put a match to his mixture and stepped back while it flared up. Louie watched this studiously.

"I don't expect you'll get any results," he said, "but it can't do any harm for you to get some practice. Now as soon as the thing's properly white hot—"

He supervised the tipping of the contents of the crucible into the cooler indulgently. He had no cause for alarm. The proportions of the mixture were admittedly wrong, which was a perfectly sound reason to give for the inevitable failure of the experiment. He puffed at his cigar complacently, while the Saint went down on his knees and groped around in the cooling tank.

Then something seemed to go wrong with the mechanism of Mr. Fallon's heart, and for a full five seconds he was unable to breathe. His eyes bulged, and the smug tolerance froze out of his face as if it had been nipped in the bud by the same antarctic zephyr that was playing weird tricks up and down his spine. For the Saint had straightened up again with an exclamation of delight; and in the palm of his hand he displayed three little round gray pebbles.

The chill wind that was playing tricks with Louie Fallon's backbone whistled up into his head and brought out beads of cold perspiration on his brow. For a space of time that seemed to him like three or four years, he experienced all the sensations of a man who has sold somebody a pup and seen it turn out into a pedigreed prize winner.

The memory of all the hours of time, all the pounds of hard-earned money, and all the tormenting daydreams, which he had spent on his own futile experiments, flooded back into his mind in an interval of exquisite anguish that made him feel faintly sick. If he had never believed any of the stories he told about his hard luck before, he believed them all now, and more also.

The smile of happy vindication on the Saint's face was in itself an insult that made Louie's blood ferment in his veins. He felt exactly as if he had been run over by a steam roller and then invited to admire his own remarkable flatness.

"Here, wait a minute," he said hoarsely. "That isn't possible!"

"Anyway, it's happened," answered the Saint with irrefutable logic.

Louie swallowed, and picked up one of the stones which the Saint was holding. He knew enough about such things to realize that it was indubitably an uncut diamond—not quite so big as the one which he himself claimed to have made, but easily worth a hundred pounds in the ordinary market nevertheless.

"Try it again," he said huskily. "Can you remember exactly what you did last time?"

The Saint thought he could remember. He tried it again, while Louie watched him with his eyes almost popping out of his head, and his mouth hungrily half open. He himself fished in

the cooling tank as soon as the steam had dispersed, and he found two more diamonds embedded in the clinker at the bottom.

Louie Fallon had nothing to say for a long time. He paced up and down the small room, scratching his head, in the throes of the fastest thinking he had ever done in his life. Somehow or other, heaven alone knew how, the young sap who was gloating inanely over his prowess had stumbled accidentally upon the formula which Mr. Fallon had sought for half his life in vain.

And the young sap had just paid over four thousand pounds, and received in return his portion of the signed contract which entitled him to a half-share in all the proceeds of the invention. By fair means or foul—preferably more or less fair, for Mr. Fallon was not by nature a violent man—that contract had to be recovered. There was only one way to recover it that Mr. Fallon could see; it was a painful way, but with so much at stake Louie Fallon was no piker.

Finally he stopped his pacing, and turned round.

"Look here," he said. "This is a tremendous business." The wave of his hand embraced unutterably gigantic issues. "I won't try to explain it all to you, because you're not a scientist and you wouldn't understand. But it's—tremendous— It means—"

He waved his hand again. "At any rate it makes a lot of difference to me. I—I don't know whether I will go away after all. A thing like that's got to be investigated. You see, I'm a scientist. If I didn't get to the bottom of it all, it'd be on my conscience. I'd have it preying on my mind."

The pathetic resignation on Mr. Fallon's countenance spoke of a mute and glorious martyrdom to the cause of science that was almost holy. He was throwing himself heart and soul into the job, acting as if his very life depended on it—which, in his estimation, it practically did.

"Look here," he burst out, taking the bull by the horns, "will you go on being a sport? Will you tear up that agreement we've just signed, and let me engage you as—as—as manager?"

It was here that the sportiness of Simon Templar fell into considerable disrepute. He was quite unreasonably reluctant to surrender his share in a fortune for the sake of science. He failed to see what all the fuss was about. What, he wanted to know, was there to prevent Mr. Fallon continuing his scientific researches under the existing arrangement? Louie, with the sweat streaming down inside his shirt, ran through a catalogue of excuses that would have made the fortune of a politician.

The Saint became mercenary. This was a language which Louie

Fallon could talk, much as he disliked it. He offered to return the money which Simon had invested. He did, in fact, actually return the money; and the Saint wavered. Louie became reckless. He was not quite as broke as he had tried to tell Mr. Olomo.

"I could give you a thousand pounds," he said. "That's a quick profit for you, isn't it? And you would still have your salary as manager.

"I'll go to the bank and get it for you right away," he added.

He did not go to the bank, because he had no bank account; but he went to see Mr. Olomo, who on such occasions served an almost equally useful purpose. Louie's credit was good, and he was able to secure a loan to make up the deficiencies in his own purse at a purely nominal thirty per cent interest. He hurried back to the flat where he had left Simon Templar and stuck the notes into his hand—it was the only time Mr. Fallon had ever parted gladly with any sum of money.

"Now I shall have to get to work," said Mr. Fallon, indicating that he wished to be alone.

"What about my contract as manager?" murmured the Saint.

"I'll ring up my solicitor and ask him to fix it right away," Louie promised him.

Five minutes after Simon Templar had left him, he was tearing back to Mr. Olomo in a taxi, with the paraphernalia from his washstand stacked up on the seat, and his suitcases beside him.

"I've made my fortune, Ollie," he declared somewhat hysterically. "All this thing needs is some proper financing. Watch me, and I'll show you what I can do."

He set out to demonstrate what he could do; but something seemed to have gone wrong with the formula. He tried again, with equally unsatisfactory results. He tried three and four times more, but he produced no diamonds. Something inside him turned colder every time he failed.

"I tell you, I saw him do it, Ollie," he babbled frantically. "He mixed the things up himself, and somehow he hit on the proportions that I've been lookin' for all these years."

"Maybe he has the diamonds palmed in his hand when he puts it in the tin, Louie," suggested Mr. Olomo cynically.

Louie sat with his head in his hands. The quest for synthetic wealth faded beside another ambition which was starting to monopolize his whole horizon. The only thing he asked of life at that moment was a chance to meet the Saint again—preferably down a dark alley beside the river, with a blunt instrument ready to his hand. But the world was full of men who cherished that ambition. It always would be.

beyond reasonable doubt

by . . . Kathleen Miner

A quick verdict of guilty would have satisfied most of the jury. But Mrs. Arnold had a memory which time could not efface.

THE JURY, nine men and three women, filed out. The accused, a man in his early twenties with lank dark hair and a thin, sullen face, was taken back to his cell. The judge left for his chambers, and the lawyers started gathering papers and snapping briefcases. Reporters yawned, stretched, and one of them lit a cigarette. "How long?" he asked, indicating the jury room with a jerk of his head.

"An hour, to make it look legal," said Sawyer from the *News*. "The guy hasn't a chance."

"Two," said the AP man yawning again. "That'll give 'em a full day."

"Hung jury," said Anders laconically. He was the local man; the others looked their interest.

"How come?" asked Sawyer.

"Mrs. Arnold," said Anders. He fumbled in his pocket, brought out an empty pack and borrowed from Sawyer.

"Which one was she?" asked the AP.

It isn't often that a manuscript by a brilliant new writer arrives on our desk with a background and cast of characters so extraordinarily timely and pertinent that it seems almost to be a continuation of an experience recently shared by millions of our fellow citizens. We hardly think it necessary to mention the trial to which we refer, or to stress how completely it turned the thoughts of almost everyone toward jury room portals.

"Number Four. Mousy, Queen Mary hat. She wore gloves."

"Her!" Sawyer exploded a laugh. "With that get-up? She wouldn't say boo to the cat."

Anders dug out a ragged wallet and extracted a limp bill. "Hung jury. Here's five."

"Guilty—in two hours. I'm covering you," said Sawyer. No sane jury would lose half a day's pay by being in a hurry. They gave the bills to the AP man who wasn't betting and went across the street to Taylor's Tavern for a short beer . . .

Mrs. Arnold gazed about the jury room, accepted the chair Mr. Jenson drew out for her, and sat down at the scarred oak table. She took off her gloves, folded them carefully and tucked them in her handbag which she held on her lap. There was a general scraping of chairs, and shifting of bodies as the eleven jurors settled to their task. Only Mrs. Arnold sat motionless, looking straight before her, remembering the judge's charge: "If you feel that the evidence presented by the State is beyond all reasonable doubt . . ."

At the head of the table Jenson, the foreman, adjusted his glasses. He was a short, plump man with a placid exterior. Like his companions he had acknowledged in open court that he did not know the defendant, and had no knowledge of the crime of which he was accused beyond what he had read in the papers. He had not formed an opinion, and was not opposed to capital punishment. He now looked over his temporary domain and smiled benevolently.

"No need of rushing it," Jenson announced. "Might as well get it straight on the first ballot. Anybody got any questions in mind?"

"What," asked Mrs. Arnold timidly, "is a reasonable doubt?"

Jenson drew his brows together and pursed his lips. He had been on juries before and knew what a woman could do if not squelched at the start. He permitted his fingers to tap the table while he thought of a proper rejoinder, one that would settle Mrs. Arnold for the good of all.

"A reasonable doubt's a doubt that's in reason," he said, "which there ain't in this case. The man's guilty as sin." He struck the table with his fist and Mrs. Arnold jumped.

"Oh," she gasped. "Thank you," she added primly.

"Let's get it over," said the juror across the table. He owned a small grocery store and his clerk was unreliable.

"No hurry," said his neighbor who wanted a full day.

There was desultory talk. The male jurors smoked; the two women, sitting by Mrs. Arnold, whispered together and shivered agreeably. The crime had been

a shocking affair; an old lady waylaid as she walked the shadowy half-block from the bus stop to the Memorial Home, brutally slugged and her purse stolen. The evidence was circumstantial except for one witness, Mrs. Whitlow, the Matron from the Home who had come out to meet the old lady. She had seen a man running around the corner just before she stumbled over the crumpled body.

Mrs. Arnold had heard her testimony with misgiving. Had she known Mrs. Whitlow was to be a witness, the only witness, she would have claimed prior opinion and been excused. She had often said she wouldn't believe Sara Whitlow under oath; she had heard Mrs. Whitlow identify the accused, a young man named Jack Leeds who had been in trouble before, and she didn't believe her. She didn't believe it was possible for any one to identify a running man half a block away.

Mrs. Arnold sighed and shrank back in her chair. Again she heard the judge's voice, "If you are convinced beyond reasonable doubt that the defendant is guilty as charged by the State . . ."

She had listened very carefully during the trial, especially to the objections made by the defending lawyer, and there had been many objections. Aside from protesting every statement made by the Prosecutor there had been no defense. Jack Leeds said he was innocent, that he was waiting for his girl from 8:30 to 9:15 on the corner by Walgren's Drug Store. It was cold, and he had sat in the stairway leading up to Phillips' Shoe Store on the second floor. He hadn't seen anyone he knew during that time—and no one had seen him. The girl, Gladys Maybee, said he stood her up. She had waited from 8:45 until 9:30 and Jack hadn't come in.

Mrs. Arnold hadn't thought much of Gladys. She wasn't the sort of girl Mrs. Arnold approved. Her heels were too high, her nylons too sheer and her skirt, when she sat in the witness chair, showed her knees. Her nails were too red, and her make-up a mask that concealed every hint of character in her face. The girl had been a reluctant witness and each side had handled her with care.

Mrs. Arnold had wondered what would have come out had her testimony consisted of anything beyond "yes" and "no," and had decided that, along with Sara Whitlow, she didn't believe Gladys Maybee under oath.

It was all very distressing. Mrs. Arnold had a strong sense of right and duty. Since her name had been drawn, she had made no attempt to escape from jury duty, though the idea of being asked to decide the life or

death of a fellow being was deeply and personally repugnant. She herself was extremely careful to tell the truth, even when, during her married life and immediately after the death of her husband, a little shading would have been much more convenient.

She was vaguely aware of laws concerning perjury and felt, intuitively, that neither Gladys Maybee nor Sara Whitlow gave it a thought. She let the talk and the tobacco smoke float over and around her unnoticed. How could she vote for acquittal when everything the prosecutor had said, every witness he had called, proved that Leeds was undisciplined, unscrupulous, and dishonest; that he had been a juvenile delinquent at ten, placed on probation at twelve, sent to the State School for three years at fifteen, and now, at twenty-two after a dishonorable discharge from the Army was on trial for the wanton murder of a harmless old woman?

Mrs. Arnold shuddered slightly and shrank farther into her chair. Jack Leeds was not a nice young man—no doubt about *that*.

Her mind shifted to the lawyer for the defense. She felt very sorry for him. He was a young man and he had worked very hard with very little to work on. Really nothing at all but Leeds' insistence that he spent forty-five minutes sitting in a dark stairway waiting for Gladys—who had come from the opposite side and had spent forty-five minutes waiting for him. Gladys had met friends in the drug store. She could prove where she was. Mrs. Arnold felt more bewildered than ever and her head was beginning to ache.

The groceryman, Mr. Otto, suddenly pushed back his chair and took out his watch. "Quarter of twelve. Let's get it over," he said briskly.

Jenson glanced towards the door—if the bailiff would come with lunch he could put off the vote for another hour. But the door remained closed and he was forced to look around the table. How simple it would have been to have had six dollars for the day instead of three, but only one or two had wits enough to realize it.

"All right," he said reluctantly, "we'll vote. Needn't write it—we're all agreed." He looked at the juror on his right.

"Guilty," said the juror with a smack of relish.

"Guilty," said the next, and the word ran round the table like a wave until it stopped at Mrs. Arnold.

"Well, how do you vote?" asked Jenson impatiently.

"No," said Mrs. Arnold, moistening her lips.

"You say 'guilty' or 'not guilty,' " explained the foreman wearily.

"Not guilty," said Mrs. Arnold.

Years of living with Mr. Arnold had taught her the futility of argument. She sat in her chair and let the waves of sound wash over her. She had no words with which to defend her stand. She thought Jack Leeds capable of any wickedness, but the judge had said "beyond reasonable doubt," and her doubts as to the veracity of the two witnesses were very reasonable indeed. She bent her head, heavy beneath its unfashionable toque, and let the words roll on unanswered.

The bailiff brought lunch and they ate. He removed the trays and locked the door again. The exasperated jurors gathered around Mrs. Arnold. They argued, cajoled, threatened, and pleaded. They spoke to her singly and in groups. Mrs. Arnold listened politely — and shook her head.

"But why—tell us why!" cried the younger of the women who, more imaginative than the others, could picture herself held in the dingy, smoky jury room for days and weeks. "Tell us why, Mrs. Arnold."

But Mrs. Arnold shook her head. She shared the younger woman's anxiety, indeed, she surpassed it, being so dizzy and tired that she could see the end as coming only when she herself was carried from the room, quite dead. But she could not compromise with duty. She folded her hands carefully in her lap to still their trembling and shook her head.

At six o'clock the bailiff brought dinner. He also opened the windows and aired the room.

Mrs. Arnold and the imaginative woman went to the lavatory together. "Please, Mrs. Arnold, please tell us why you think he's not guilty."

"I don't believe we're supposed to influence one another," said Mrs. Arnold.

"I don't care who influences me as long as I get out of here tonight," said her companion.

They went back to the jury room.

Mrs. Arnold watched the woman moving among the others without attention. She was very tired. Her self-imposed silence had been a strain, and now she was afraid she had said too much in the washroom. Jurors, she thought, ought to have a handbook, or go to classes. They had classes for everything else; how to operate the voting machines, how to freeze foods, how to build rock gardens or wading pools. She felt herself getting light headed; her thoughts were jumping too fast. If they didn't stop she would be ill. The foreman was pounding on the table, seeking their attention. Mrs. Arnold cringed as at a personal rebuke.

"We're going to vote again,"

said Jenson importantly. "We'll write the votes on these slips—so if anyone wants to change her mind, she can." He looked at Mrs. Arnold sternly.

Mrs. Arnold took the slip and a pencil. Without her glasses the paper was a white blur. She wrote carefully.

The foreman gathered the slips and began to deal them out in a pile. "Guilty, guilty, guilty," he dealt. His hand moved, stopped, moved again. A slip lay by itself on the bare table. "Not guilty." He looked at Mrs. Arnold and frowned heavily. "Guilty, guilty, guilty," the deal went on. "Not guilty, not guilty." He glared at the women. "Guilty, not guilty, not guilty." He slammed down the last slip and sat back, stupefied. "What's the big idea?" he growled.

"Looks like we vote again," said Mr. Otto mildly.

"You folks crazy?" asked the foreman. "We come in here—all set for a verdict—quickest on record only we didn't want it that way. We wanted to take plenty of time, to be real sure—an' now look at us!"

The tall man at the end of the table cleared his throat. "Precipitous action is always dangerous. We have been saved from a grievous error—a miscarriage of justice. We would have condemned an innocent youth on his past record. Gentlemen—ladies—when, on future mornings we awake refreshed from peaceful slumbers, the fruit of a clear conscience, it will be due to the courageous action of a modest, intelligent little woman who refused to be hoodwinked by a lot of fast smart talk and the word of a painted huzzy. Mr. Foreman, pass the ballots again."

Once more the rush and roar of words swept over Mrs. Arnold in a series of sound and explosion that made her close her eyes and rest her head on her hand.

"Please," she whispered, but no one heard her, the words surged on. A white slip lay in front of her, she groped for it with her left hand, it was so hard to see—she found her pencil and wrote . . .

The judge came through from his chambers. He tried to straighten the fatigued stoop from his shoulders and failed. The jury had been out ten hours. The prisoner sat by his counsel, a guard behind him. His face, still sullen, was pale, withdrawn. He was chewing gum. His lawyer nudged his arm, whispered. He looked around, startled, then swallowed the gum. The jury filed in and took their seats, the foreman standing.

"Members of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

"Yes, Your Honor. We find the defendant Not Guilty." There was a gasp, then a burst of applause. Mr. Jenson sat down . . .

In Taylor's Tavern the AP man had declared the bets forfeit and they were drinking it up. Sawyer of the *News* came back from the phone.

"That's done," he said picking up his glass. "How come, the verdict?" he asked.

"Mrs. Arnold," said Anders, the local man.

"But how—and why?" the AP wanted to know.

"Shot her husband twenty years ago. Acquitted," said Anders.

"Give," said Sawyer, reaching for his pencil.

"Leave the old gal alone," the AP ordered. "What's the story Anders?"

Anders nursed his glass. "Happened up-state. I was a kid, on my first job. Lots of feeling at the time. Old man Arnold was a respected citizen. Milkman finds him in the kitchen, dead. Mrs. Arnold isn't there, they find her in the cemetery, at her son's grave. Arnold was shot with his own gun. They held her for trial. Circumstantial evidence: no defense. Prosecution brings out Arnold's been a regular heller on the q.t.—making for motive. She denies all knowledge, just says she didn't shoot him. Jury is out thirty minutes—acquitted. Six months later man in the next town's in a car smash—can't live — says Arnold seduced his daughter, arranged for an operation and the daughter died. The father went to Arnold's house, half crazy. Arnold was in the kitchen with the gun on the table. The father grabbed it first.

"More headlines in the paper —pictures. Send me out to interview Mrs. Arnold. She's sweet but firm. No interview. Couple of months she sells her house and leaves town. End of story." Anders picked up his glass and finished the drink.

"And they left her on the jury?" asked Sawyer.

"Who knew?" said Anders.

"But if Leeds is guilty . . ." began the AP man.

"He ain't," said Anders. "Went by that stairway next morning. Phillips' picking up gum wrappers swearing blue hell."

"So what?" asked Sawyer.

"Detail, son. Every time Leeds came into court he swallowed his gum." Anders motioned for another round of drinks.

larceny in the dark

by . . . Mann Rubin

Nothing in the world could have *enticed* Bilow into crime. But what could he do when tainted money fairly shouted: "Take me!"

As soon as Henry Bilow was seated he experienced his first qualms of guilt. Could this really be he attending a movie in the middle of a Wednesday afternoon? Never before in the fourteen years he had worked as a salesman for the Perkins' Leather Goods Company had he indulged himself in such a way.

Never, in fact, had he allowed himself the privileges of any outside relaxation when his mind was tuned to the functions of selling. Yet the idea had consumed him almost as soon as he had recognized it earlier in the day. It had consumed him to the exclusion of all else, and now he was sitting in the darkness of a Broadway theater waiting to be entertained.

Slowly as his eyes adjusted to the silhouettes of the theater he began to feel more confident. The darkness obscured the outlines of the objects about him, and such anonymity had a lulling effect upon his senses. He had arrived just as the newsreel was starting and this rare bit of cinematic precision seemed to sanction and justify his escape.

This is one of those fascinatingly irrepressible stories of the little man with so many bitter frustrations gnawing at him that he's a "natural" for the first alluring criminal opportunity which presents itself. Step by step Mann Rubin traces Henry Bilow's undoing, with devastating irony, logic and wit. We particularly liked the whiplash denouement—and we think you will too.

Henry lifted his sample case onto the seat beside him and settled back to enjoy the glimpses of life flashing before him. It was going to be a delightful afternoon.

The newsreel passed quickly into a sports-short into a Bugs Bunny cartoon and finally into darkness. Henry turned one leg over the other and waited for the feature picture. He had chosen the theater at random and was not certain of the film's quality although the marquee promised thrills galore.

He looked at his luminous watch, a Benrus that had been presented to him by Mr. Perkins on the completion of his tenth year with the company. It was three-thirty. The theater remained dark for several more moments, and Henry became conscious of the low disapproving whispers that gradually swept through the audience.

It was no doubt a technical difficulty, he told himself, glancing around the darkened interior in an effort to estimate the number of his compatriots who were also hidden by the steady, prolonged veil of blackness. It was a sparse crowd, but larger than he had at first anticipated. Someone started to whistle, and in scattered sections of the balcony fragments of impatient clapping sounded.

But something was wrong. He became aware of it slowly as the stage lights brightened and a soft, rising glow spread over the theater, giving everything more definite shape and proportion. Not a stage show, he thought. There were no advertisements outside. Instinctively he lowered himself deeper into his seat. He could sense the squirming disquietude of the people all around him as the lights gained full strength.

Oh, damn, damn, Henry thought. What if someone from the office were here? What if Mr. Perkins or his wife had suddenly decided to take in a movie and were sitting right behind him? What could he tell them? What could he say? But he had a right to take the afternoon off Fourteen years with one firm without being sick a day was proof of his loyalty. Everybody was permitted one break in a schedule, one lull in the monotony of Wednesday afternoons. He had made his sales for the day. Mr. Perkins would be able to vacation in Bermuda again next winter and did not need this simple luxury he was affording himself.

But what if someone close by had recognized him and was now making the identification positive by observing the frightened, secretive manner in which he was behaving? Henry straightened in his chair and moved his head slowly from right to left, scanning his neighbors for some ini-

tial sign of exposure. There was none. All their faces bore the same embarrassed, furtive expression as if they had been awakened from a long, lonely sleep.

The catcalls and the clapping increased as a beam of light, stronger than the other illumination, focused in the center of the stage. A small, bald-headed man with a black mustache emerged from a wing and stepped into the light. He carried a portable microphone with a wire running back along the floor. He appeared awkward and nervous and Henry immediately cast him in the role of an old-time comedian who would lead the audience in college songs.

The small man fumbled with the microphone momentarily and then began speaking. "Ladies and Gentlemen, your attention please," he said. "Something very unusual has just happened and we must have your complete cooperation."

A last stubborn flutter of irritated applause sounded, reached a peak and subsided. The small man tried again. "In a few moments our ushers will pass up the aisles searching for an important envelope which has been lost."

Of all the luck, Henry thought. The one afternoon he'd picked to enjoy a movie there had to be annoying and most unusual complications.

"The contents of this envelope is highly valuable and we believe it is beneath one of the seats in the theater," continued the small man. "Would you all kindly stand and examine the wooden base of your own seat and the empty ones near you. Our ushers are passing down the aisle now. Anyone finding the envelope please notify them immediately. Thank you."

A group of blue-uniformed ushers sped down the aisle hurriedly as if they had been rehearsed in the technique many times. They broke into clusters and began patroling the four aisles of the theater. Around him Henry could hear the sundry noises of people rising en masse and the metallic creak of seats being turned.

The small man remained on the stage observing the activity and occasionally offering suggestions into his microphone. Henry watched two teen-age boys, obviously truants from school, race along the empty row of seats in front of him, flipping them back as if expecting to discover the treasures of a thousand kings beneath each one.

"Has anyone found it yet?" coaxed the small man anxiously.

There were several negative responses and more catcalls. Henry noticed the two teen-agers had begun to work on his row. He decided he would not be bothered by the young fools. He noticed also that a group of ush-

ers were preparing to invade his row from the opposite direction. The two boys were within four seats of him when he made certain he would not be annoyed by their nonsense.

"I've already searched this area," Henry said coldly. "There is nothing here."

The boys stopped only when they were within one seat of him, and then, looking as if they had been denied a great pleasure, they begrudgingly turned back and began investigating another row. An energetic usher approached Henry from the other side and asked if he had found anything. He remained adamant, shaking his head and repeating that the area around him was clear.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, are you positive there isn't an envelope taped to the back of your seat?" the small man inquired.

The excitement of the first request was dying down and people were returning to their seats. Even the two juvenile delinquents had discontinued their rummage and were sitting quietly several rows in front of Henry.

Another minute of wasted effort went by as the ushers checked the final rows of the orchestra and moved into the balcony.

"Any luck up there?" the small man asked.

"Let's get on with the picture," someone shouted. The suggestion was followed by clapping and shrill whistling.

The small man came to the center of the stage and the static sound of his breathing could be heard over the microphone. "Listen to me," he said gravely. "Please listen to me. Several days ago an accountant in this theater absconded with twenty-five thousand dollars in cash. We have kept this news out of the papers in the hope that he would be apprehended quickly and the money returned without publicity. Five minutes ago the police in Jacksonville, Florida called to tell us a man fitting the description of our accountant has been picked up.

"He has admitted the theft. He says he stuck the money in an envelope and taped it beneath a seat in this theater. The Jacksonville police are still on the wire and we must have the evidence so we can start extradition proceedings immediately. Now once again has anyone found the envelope?"

There was a sharp, intense silence that even Henry Bilow found himself participating in. Excited murmurs fluttered across the theater as the small man stroked his face nervously and began pacing the stage. An usher walked onto the stage and whispered to him. The small man nodded, looked at his watch and gazed back at the audience.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we regret having had to call this unscheduled intermission. Obviously if the envelope has not been found by this time it isn't in this theater. We'll notify the Florida police and have them question the accountant further. Again we apologize for the delay and hope you'll stay and enjoy the rest of the show. Thanks for your cooperation and patience and now back to the picture."

The small man smiled and walked from the stage trailing the microphone wire behind him. A few seconds of unharmonious applause followed his exit and fell away quickly. The lights remained stationary another minute and gradually submerged into the soothing comfort of darkness.

Henry leaned back in his seat. His palms were moist and he wiped them hastily against the seat in front of him. Luckily no one from the office had also followed a crazy whim and ended up in this theater. That would have been something. How odd it all seemed, how really incredible.

In all the years he had been going to motion pictures, over the week-ends and during the hot summer nights of his annual two weeks' vacation, nothing like this had ever happened before. He reminded himself to tell some of the boys in the office about it. They always enjoyed a good joke.

A hard marble column of light from the projector's booth harpooned the screen and music began. Henry found a comfortable position and moved deeper into it, attempting to erase the incident from his mind. For a moment he thought of the captured accountant. He wondered what type of man would jeopardize his life for twenty-five thousand dollars. In a way he felt sorry for the fellow. Not that he condoned such acts, but because of the incident that had just occurred he felt a kinship with the offender as if he himself was involved in the crime.

The feature picture came on, the screen credits flashing spectacularly on and off as the music swelled. The director's name appeared in the last position and the music skidded into the actuality of the film. Henry tried to concentrate. He allowed himself one last vision of the accountant sitting in a hot Florida jail sobbing out his confession. Twenty-five thousand dollars, Henry thought. Was it worth it? Twenty-five thousand could be an awful lot of money.

The picture opened on an early morning scene in New York City. A street-cleaner cleaned a street. He stopped and waved at a cop. The cop waved back. The camera followed the cop. $25,000. A man was polish-

ing the brass sign outside a hotel. The camera moved into the hotel. A waiter rolled a breakfast table down a hall. A man could work a lifetime and never know $25,000. The waiter stopped at a door and knocked. A face with crazy eyes opened the door and the waiter pushed his table into the room.

But what if someone had found the $25,000 and not returned it? Perhaps even at that moment a man was hiding the envelope under his coat and walking out of the theater. Henry whirled around quickly and surveyed the black interior of the house. Nothing stirred.

The waiter added up the cost of the breakfast on a check, $25,000. The other man had disappeared, $25,000. The waiter with the $25,000 began searching for the man with the crazy $25,000. Opening closets, $25,000. Peeking under beds, $25,000. A window was open, $25,000. Florida, sunshine, beautiful women. The man with the crazy eyes was standing out on a window ledge $25,000 above the street.

What would he do if he had $25,000? He would quit his job. He would tell Mr. Perkins what he thought of him and then he would go to Florida and lie in the sun. He would get a girl friend. With $25,000 he could find a beauty. Maybe one of those brown-skin models who were always posing in white bathing suits against a blue lagoon. Okay what else? A car, yes. New clothes, yes. A television set, yes. A new apartment, yes, yes, *yes* . . .

The picture was getting exciting. Cops were running through the hotel corridors. Sirens wailed. People in the street screamed up at the figure on the ledge and hid their eyes.

Mr. Perkins had $25,000. Rockefeller had it a thousand times over. J. P. Morgan bathed in it. Probably the man who owned the theater had it and the director of the film and perhaps even the actor playing the crazy man.

Only Henry Bilow and the accountant sobbing in a Florida jail didn't have it. That's where the kinship was. But that wasn't strictly true either. The accountant still had the money. He had lied when he said it was hidden in the theater. Hadn't the entire theater been searched? And certainly people were honest enough to return what did not belong to them.

A cop offered the crazy man a cigarette. They talked to each other.

Yet the theater hadn't been searched completely. What about the seats around him? The two boys had come gallivanting up his row, but he had stopped them before they had finished their inspection. There were still two seats to be examined.

They had found the mother of the crazy man and she was coming into the hotel. Agnes Moorehead, a wonderful actress. Flash bulbs popped.

Okay, just for the heck of it feel the next seat. No, watch the picture. Do it slow so nobody will see. That's it slow, like you're stretching. No harm done. Okay, now turn the seat up. No noise. Slow. There, I told you. Nothing. Go back to the picture. Good-bye $25,000. You'd have returned it anyway.

The mother screamed that she wanted her baby safe. The crazy man moved closer to the ledge. People moaned.

There was still the seat under him. No, no, no, he was behaving like an adolescent idiot. Just once feel under the seat. No! I promise not to ask again. Look once and I'll go away for good. No! No! That's it, slow like you are bending over to tie a shoe. Come on, a little more.

Don't make yourself conspicuous. Run your hand underneath all the way. There, I told you noth . . . Oh, God! God! Are you sure? Yes, yes, I can feel the bulge in the envelope. Rip it off the seat. Slow so it doesn't make a noise. Got it? Now call an usher. No, into your pocket, you fool. Think about it first. There's always time for an usher. Okay, think about it. $25,000, $25,000, $25,000.

The cop and the crazy man were talking again. Down in the street a young girl made eyes at a young boy. The girl had beautiful eyes. It was a beautiful scene. It was the last scene that Henry remembered.

He sat back in his seat and closed his eyes and tried to make the theater stop trembling. He remembered it was Wednesday and as soon as he was out of the theater he must return to the office and help Mr. Perkins check invoices. Mr. Perkins would be in his office smoking a black five o'clock cigar and together they would go over sales receipts. Mr. Perkins would blow stale smoke in his face the way he always did, and yell at him if he made a mistake.

They would work late eating cold sandwiches and drinking cold coffee until it was ten o'clock. Mr. Perkins would then call his wife and talk baby talk and tell her he was leaving for home. Mr. Perkins would thank him for his overtime and praise his conscientious work and then forget him.

Afterwards he would go home and read the papers in bed and fall asleep. In the morning his alarm clock would wake him back into the cycle. Henry took a deep, wistful breath as he realized that was one picture that had played its final performance. $25,000 was a lot of money.

Casually he touched his inside pocket to make certain it was

still there. He looked at his watch. If he got up now and walked out they would be sure to jump him. The theater was probably surrounded. He had to play it smart and see the picture through. The box office undoubtedly had a good turnover and if there were detectives in the lobby they might get tired of examining everyone carefully by the time he left.

He began to excite himself with future dreams. He thought of Mr. Perkins and the look of shocked disbelief that would appear on his face when he gave notice. He feasted on this image avidly and then turned his mind to all the beautiful women he had ever seen or wanted. Before he had been Henry Bilow, a $53.60-a-week Henry Bilow, who was satisfied with the common pleasures of life. But now there was a richness within him, a completeness he had never hoped to attain. From this point on he would live deeply and taste all the choice morsels of happiness that twenty-five thousand dollars could purchase.

It was in the middle of Bugs Bunny that he returned to himself. The gradual realization that it was now or never stifled all moral excursions temporarily and he pushed the envelope deeper into his pocket and stood up. He picked up his coat and sample case and began edging his way toward the aisle. The theater had filled up considerably since he last observed it and he passed several elderly women who grumbled in unison as he stumbled over their sleeping feet.

He made the aisle and slowly started up the runway, his eyes scrutinizing the shadows for the first hint of suspicion. His face was moist from perspiration and he removed his lapel handkerchief and dabbed at his face and neck to erase all signs of apprehension. Why didn't they arrest him now? What were they waiting for?

The carpet beneath his feet seemed to be pulling him toward its own destination. Behind him Bugs Bunny completed a humorous prank and from a distance people laughed. He was shaking and his legs felt very tired and he could feel new perspiration trickling along the lengths of his arms.

He was breathing heavily when he reached the smooth marble balustrade at the back of the theater and leaned against it. He remembered his coat and put it on, flattening it against him so nothing protruded. He noticed that an usher was stationed at each aisle, but they appeared unaware of him.

A young couple holding hands came up the aisle he had just left and paraded out the main exit. He caught a quick glimpse of the outside lobby before the heavy metal door swung shut. It

looked safe. He buttoned his coat, took a final deep breath of the sweet, pungent theater air and moved toward the lobby.

They did not pounce on him. An elderly ticket-taker glanced at him impassively, but the rest of the lobby was empty. Near the street he realized he was moving too fast and he slowed down to stare at some photographs of the next attraction. He saw nothing. The small man with the mustache was nowhere in sight.

Broadway was never more beautiful, he thought as he merged deeper into the hustling, weaving throng of alien faces. It was still daylight out, the cool diminishing daylight of a Spring evening. He walked a long time, maneuvering down side streets, stepping into shadows and finally returning to Broadway. The crowds shifted, the faces changed, but no eyes narrowed with suspicion, no footsteps trailed in his wake. He was safe, $25,000 safe.

All at once he knew he needed a drink. He had never taken a drink during a business day in his whole life, but this was an occasion. At Forty-fifth Street he slipped into a bar and ordered a double rye and ginger ale. He drank it quickly the way he had seen it done in motion pictures when the hero performed an act changing his life. He coughed when it went down, but it was good and he ordered another.

He looked at the watch Mr. Perkins had given him in commemoration of his ten years of meaningless effort. What irony that it should signal the time of his final dissociation. It was almost five-thirty. He changed a quarter, finished off his second double rye and began searching for a phone booth.

It did not take long to get through. Mr. Perkins sounded calm and confident and for a moment he was unsure. Then he remembered and he touched his coat and heard the envelope crinkle underneath. He asked Mr. Perkins if he was expected tonight to help check invoices. Mr. Perkins said of course he was and why hadn't he called sooner. He told Mr. Perkins he hadn't felt like calling sooner. He told Mr. Perkins he hadn't felt like calling at all. The warm melody of the rye was beginning to play all through him. He told Mr. Perkins his salary wasn't enough. Mr. Perkins hesitated and asked if he was feeling well. He counted up to fourteen and told Mr. Perkins that was how many years he had been working for him.

Mr. Perkins accused him of being drunk. He called Mr. Perkins a name. He called Mr. Perkins a stingy tightwad, who knew nothing of the souls of his employees. Mr. Perkins said he should call back when he was feeling better. He called Mr. Perkins a name and tears fell upon his cheek. Mr. Perkins said he was fired.

He said he had quit ten minutes before. Mr. Perkins said goodbye and hung up. He called Mr. Perkins a name and took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes. He returned to the bar and had another double rye.

It was an hour later when he emerged from the subway near his house. The sky was darker and a small, crisp wind whispered against his face. He was not drunk. He was as sober as a judge making twenty-five thousand dollars a day. He made his way cautiously toward his brownstone house on West Eighty-eighth Street. He had lived in it for almost eleven years. One room with a kitchenette on the third floor, and a radio he wasn't allowed to play after ten-thirty.

On the corner he stopped and studied the street he had lived on for so long. It was a lonely street, its double row of brownstones looking like stained teeth grinning at each other. In the middle of the block a group of small boys in cowboy suits waved guns at each other. A stray cat emerged from the comfort of a stoop and wandered off dejectedly. A man and woman argued loudly from an open window. The street was worn and ugly.

Henry Bilow cleansed himself of all its unclean memories and then hurried up to his room.

Inside he did not open the envelope immediately. He walked about the room holding the envelope in his hand and pausing to fondle some tattered ornament that symbolized, in its small way, his previous existence. At last, after examining the street for a sign of unorthodox movement, he pulled down the shade, twisted on the naked light bulb hanging above him and began breaking through the seal of his beautiful $25,000 dream.

The first thing he saw was the stage money. It seemed to leap out of the envelope, green and orange, each one with the name "Bank of Fantasy" written across it and a distorted face of Washington smiling from its center. He shuffled through the bogus bills rapidly seeking the real $25,000.

The stage money fell through his fingers, spinning and twisting orange and green. He found the envelope again and tore into it until he saw the letter. His eyes could hardly focus and his hands were shaking so that he had to wait until the writing became steady. It was meant to be very amusing.

Dear Patron,

We know the weakness of the flesh and we forgive your impetuous action. As you can guess by now your seat was one of those chosen to help promote the picture "Fugitive," which comes to this theater next week. "Fugitive," which features an all-star cast, is the story of a man who

accidentally steals $25,000 *and the strange consequences that befall him.*

Hedda Hopper says "Fugitive" is dynamite. Louella Parsons says "Fugitive" is the year's best. The whole country will soon be talking about this picture—so be sure and tell your friends. And as a special prize for finding the envelope, present this letter at our box office and we will give you two tickets to the opening night performance of "Fugitive." Thanks again for being such a good sport and sorry this wasn't the real McCoy.

THE MANAGEMENT.

Down below in the street a small boy playing in his cowboy suit shouted, "Bang, Bang . . . You're dead, you're dead, you're dead!"

THE SAINT OFFERS—NEXT MONTH—THESE HEADLINERS

THE RED FOX OF THE CUMBERLANDS by LESLIE CHARTERIS

A MAN OF CONSCIENCE by SOMERSET MAUGHAM

DEATH STOPS AT A TOURIST CAMP by LESLIE FORD

PEACEFUL IN THE COUNTRY by THOMAS WALSH

A PERFECT TARGET by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

THE BODY IN THE ROCKPIT by RUFUS KING

THE IVORY STATUE by SAX ROHMER

the screaming woman

by . . . Ray Bradbury

A sensitive, lonely little girl can be *awfully* fanciful at times. But the screaming, buried woman had to be real. . . . She just had to be!

MY NAME IS Margaret Leary and I'm ten years old and in the high fifth at Central School. I haven't any brothers or sisters, but I've got a nice father and mother except they don't pay much attention to me. And anyway, we never thought we'd have anything to do with a murdered woman. Or almost, anyway.

When you're just living on a street like we live on, you don't think awful things are going to happen, like shooting or stabbing or burying people under the ground, practically in your back yard. And when it does happen you don't believe it. You just go on buttering your toast or baking a cake.

I got to tell you how it happened. It was a noon in the middle of July. It was hot and Mama said to me, "Margaret, you go to the store and buy some ice cream. It's Saturday, Dad's home for lunch, so we'll have a treat."

I ran out across the empty lot behind our house. It was a big lot, where kids had played base-

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When Ray Bradbury isn't devoting his script-writing talents to the newest Hollywood interpretation of "Moby Dick," or penning centennial tributes to Jules Verne for the NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE, *he comes up with such superlative mystery story triumphs as this. He seems determined, indeed, to add constantly to his laurels as America's number one master of fantasy, and as a detective story writer with a genius for creating and maintaining suspense with a wizardry eerily unique. Welcome again, Ray Bradbury, to our pages!*

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ball, and broken glass and stuff. And on my way back from the store with the ice cream I was just walking along, minding my own business, when all of a sudden it happened.

I heard the Screaming Woman.

I stopped and listened.

It was coming up out of the ground.

A woman was buried under the rocks and dirt and glass, and she was screaming, all wild and horrible, for someone to dig her out.

I just stood there, afraid. She kept screaming, muffled.

Then I started to run. I fell down, got up and ran some more. I got in the screen door of my house and there was Mama, calm as you please, not knowing what I knew, that there was a real live woman buried out in back of our house, just a hundred yards away, screaming bloody murder.

"Mama," I said.

"Don't stand there with the ice cream," said Mama.

"But, Mama," I said.

"Put it in the icebox," she said.

"Listen, Mama, there's a Screaming Woman in the empty lot."

"And wash your hands," said Mama.

"She was screamin' and screamin' . . ."

"Let's see now, salt and pepper," said Mama, far away.

"Listen to me," I said, loud. "We got to dig her out. She's buried under tons and tons of dirt and if we don't dig her out, she'll choke up and die."

"I'm certain she can wait until after lunch," said Mama.

"Mama, don't you believe me?"

"Of course, dear. Now wash your hands and take this plate of meat in to your father."

"I don't even know who she is or how she got there," I said. "But we got to help her before it's too late."

"Good gosh," said Mama. "Look at this ice cream. What did you do, just stand in the sun and let it melt?"

"Well, the empty lot . . ."

"Go on, now, scoot."

I went into the dining-room.

"Hi, Dad, there's a Screaming Woman in the empty lot."

"I never knew a woman who didn't," said Dad.

"I'm serious," I said.

"You look very grave," said Father.

"We've got to get picks and shovels and excavate, like for an Egyptian mummy," I said.

"I don't feel like an archaeologist, Margaret," said Father. "Now, some nice cool October day, I'll take you up on that."

"But we can't wait that long," I almost screamed. My heart was bursting in me. I was excited and scared and afraid and here was Dad, putting meat on his

plate, cutting and chewing and paying me no attention.

"Dad?" I said.

"Mmmm?" he said, chewing.

"Dad, you just gotta come out after lunch and help me," I said. "Dad, Dad, I'll give you all the money in my piggy bank!"

"Well," said Dad. "So it's a business proposition, is it? It must be important for you to offer your perfectly good money. How much money will you pay, by the hour?"

"I got five whole dollars it took me a year to save, and it's all yours."

Dad touched my arm. "I'm touched. I'm really touched. You want me to play with you and you're willing to pay for my time. Honest, Margaret, you make your old Dad feel like a piker. I don't give you enough time. Tell you what, after lunch, I'll come out and listen to your screaming woman, free of charge."

"Will you, oh, will you, really?"

"Yes, ma'am, that's what I'll do," said Dad. "But you must promise me one thing?"

"What?"

"If I come out, you must eat all of your lunch first."

"I promise," I said.

"Okay."

Mother came in and sat down and we started to eat.

"Not so fast," said Mama.

I slowed down. Then I started eating fast again.

"You heard your Mother," said Dad.

"The Screaming Woman," I said. "We got to hurry."

"I," said Father, "intend sitting here quietly and judiciously giving my attention first to my steak, then to my potatoes, and my salad, of course, and then to my ice cream, and after that to a long drink of iced coffee, if you don't mind. I may be a good hour at it. And another thing, young lady, if you mention her name, this Screaming Whatsis, once more at this table during lunch, I won't go out with you to hear her recital."

"Yes, sir."

"Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

Lunch was a million years long. Everybody moved in slow motion, like those films you see at the movies. Mama got up slow and got down slow and forks and knives and spoons moved slow. Even the flies in the room were slow. And Dad's cheek muscles moved slow. It was so slow. I wanted to scream, "Hurry! Oh, please, rush, get up, run around, come on out, run!"

But no, I had to sit, and all the while we sat there slowly, slowly eating our lunch, out there in the empty lot (I could hear her screaming in my mind. *Scream*!) was the Screaming Woman, all alone, while the

world ate its lunch and the sun was hot and the lot was empty as the sky.

"There we are," said Dad, finished at last.

"Now will you come out to see the Screaming Woman?" I said.

"First a little more iced coffee," said Dad.

"Speaking of Screaming Women," said Mother. "Charlie Nesbitt and his wife Helen had another fight last night."

"That's nothing new," said Father. "They're always fighting."

"If you ask me, Charlie's no good," said Mother. "Or her, either."

"Oh, I don't know," said Dad. "I think she's pretty nice."

"You're prejudiced. After all, you almost married her."

"You going to bring that up again?" he said. "After all, I was only engaged to her six weeks."

"You showed some sense when you broke it off."

"Oh, you know Helen. Always stagestruck. Wanted to travel in a trunk. I just couldn't see it. That broke it up. She was sweet, though. Sweet and kind."

"What did it get her? A terrible brute of a husband like Charlie."

"Dad," I said.

"I'll give you that. Charlie has got a terrible temper," said Dad. "Remember when Helen had the lead in our high school graduation play? Pretty as a picture. She wrote some songs for it herself. That was the summer she wrote that song for me."

"Ha," said Mother.

"Don't laugh. It was a good song."

"You never told me about that song."

"It was between Helen and me. Let's see, how *did* it go?"

"Dad," I said.

"You'd better take your daughter out in the back lot," said Mother, "before she collapses. You can sing me that wonderful song, later."

"Okay, come on, you," said Dad, and I ran him out of the house.

The empty lot was still empty and hot and the glass sparkled green and white and brown all around where the bottles lay.

"Now, where's this Screaming Woman?" laughed Dad.

"We forgot the shovels," I cried.

"We'll get them later, after we hear the soloist," said Dad.

I took him over to the spot. "Listen," I said.

We listened.

"I don't hear anything," said Dad, at last.

"Shh," I said. "Wait."

We listened some more. "Hey, there, Screaming Woman!" I cried.

We heard the sun in the sky. We heard the wind in the trees,

real quiet. We heard a streetcar, far away, running along. We heard a car pass.

That was all.

"Margaret," said Father. "I suggest you go lie down and put a damp cloth on your forehead."

"But she was here," I shouted. "I heard her, screaming and screaming and screaming. See, here's where the ground's been dug up." I called frantically at the earth. "Hey there, you down there!"

"Margaret," said Father. "This is the place where Mr. Kelly dug yesterday, a big hole, to bury his trash and garbage in."

"But during the night," I said, "someone else used Mr. Kelly's burying place to bury a woman. And covered it all over again."

"Well, I'm going back in and take a cool shower," said Dad.

"You won't help me dig?"

"Better not stay out here too long," said Dad. "It's hot."

Dad walked off. I heard the back door slam.

I stamped on the ground. "Darn," I said.

The screaming started again.

She screamed and screamed. Maybe she had been tired and was resting and now she began it all over, just for me.

I stood in the empty lot in the hot sun and I felt like crying. I ran back to the house and banged the door.

"Dad, she's screaming again!"

"Sure, sure," said Dad. "Come on." And he led me to my upstairs bedroom. "Here," he said. He made me lie down and put a cold rag on my head. "Just take it easy."

I began to cry. "Oh, Dad, we can't let her die. She's all buried, like that person in that story by Edgar Allen Poe, and think how awful it is to be screaming and no one paying any attention."

"I forbid you to leave the house," said Dad, worried. "You just lie there the rest of the afternoon." He went out and locked the door. I heard him and Mother talking in the front room. After a while I stopped crying. I got up and tiptoed to the window. My room was upstairs. It seemed high.

I took a sheet off the bed and tied it to the bedpost and let it out the window. Then I climbed out the window and shinnied down until I touched the ground. Then I ran to the garage, quiet, and I got a couple of shovels and I ran to the empty lot. It was hotter than ever. And I started to dig, and all the while I dug, the Screaming Woman screamed . . .

It was hard work. Shoving in the shovel and lifting the rocks and glass. And I knew I'd be doing it all afternoon and maybe I wouldn't finish in time. What could I do? Run tell other people? But they'd be like Mom and Dad, pay no attention. I just kept digging, all by myself.

About ten minutes later, Dippy Smith came along the path through the empty lot. He's my age and goes to my school.

"Hi, Margaret," he said.

"Hi, Dippy," I gasped.

"What you doing?" he asked.

"Digging."

"For what?"

"I got a Screaming lady in the ground and I'm digging for her," I said.

"I don't hear no screaming," said Dippy.

"You sit down and wait a while and you'll hear her scream yet. Or better still, help me dig."

"I don't dig unless I hear a scream," he said.

We waited.

"Listen!" I cried. "Did you *hear* it?"

"Hey," said Dippy, with slow appreciation, his eyes gleaming. "That's okay. Do it again."

"Do what again?"

"The scream."

"We got to wait," I said, puzzled.

"Do it again," he insisted, shaking my arm. "Go on." He dug in his pocket for a brown aggie. "Here." He shoved it at me. "I'll give you this marble if you do it again."

A scream came out of the ground.

"Hot dog!" said Dippy. "Teach *me* to do it!" He danced around as if I was a miracle.

"I don't . . ." I started to say.

"Did you get the *Throw-Your-Voice* book for a dime from that Magic Company in Dallas, Texas?" cried Dippy. "You got one of those tin Ventriloquist contraptions in your mouth?"

"Y-yes," I lied, for I wanted him to help. "If you'll help dig, I'll tell you about it, later."

"Swell," he said. "Give me a shovel."

We both dug together, and from time to time the Woman screamed.

"Boy," said Dippy. "You'd think she was right under foot. You're wonderful Maggie." Then he said, "What's her name?"

"Who?"

"The Screaming Woman. You must have a name for her."

"Oh, sure." I thought a moment. "Her name's Wilma Schweiger and she's a rich old woman, ninety-six years old, and she was buried by a man named Spike, who counterfeited ten-dollar bills."

"Yes, *sir*," said Dippy.

"And there's hidden treasure buried with her, and I, I'm a grave robber come to dig her out and get it," I gasped, digging excitedly.

Dippy made his eyes Oriental and mysterious. "Can I be a grave robber, too?" He got a better idea. "Let's pretend it's the Princess Ommanatra, an Egyptian queen, covered with diamonds!"

We kept digging and I

thought, *oh*, we will rescue her, we *will*. If only we keep on!

"Hey, I just got an idea," said Dippy. And he ran off and got a piece of cardboard. He scribbled on it with crayon.

"Keep digging!" I said. "We can't stop!"

"I'm making a sign. See? SLUMBERLAND CEMETERY! We can bury some birds and beetles here, in matchboxes and stuff. I'll go find some butterflies."

"No, Dippy!"

"It's more fun that way. I'll get me a dead cat, too, maybe . . ."

"Dippy, use your shovel! Please!"

"Aw," said Dippy. "I'm tired. I think I'll go home and take a nap."

"You can't do that."

"Who says so?"

"Dippy, there's something I want to tell you."

"What?"

He gave the shovel a kick.

I whispered in his ear. "There's really a woman buried here."

"Why sure there is," he said. "You said it, Maggie."

"You don't believe me, either."

"Tell me how you throw your voice and I'll keep on digging."

"But I can't tell you, because I'm not doing it," I said. "Look, Dippy. I'll stand way over here and you listen there."

The Screaming Woman screamed again.

"Hey!" said Dippy, "There really *is* a woman here!"

"That's what I tried to say."

"Let's dig!" said Dippy.

We dug for twenty minutes.

"I wonder who she is?"

"I don't know."

"I wonder if it's Mrs. Nelson or Mrs. Turner or Mrs. Bradley. I wonder if she's pretty. Wonder what color her hair is? Wonder if she's thirty or ninety or sixty?"

"Dig!" I said.

The mound grew high.

"Wonder if she'll reward us for digging her up."

"Sure."

"A quarter do you think?"

"More than that. I bet it's a dollar."

Dippy remembered as he dug, "I read a book once of magic. There was a Hindu with no clothes on who crept down in a grave and slept there sixty days, not eating anything, no malts, no chewing gum or candy, no air, for sixty days." His face fell. "Say, wouldn't it be awful if it was only a radio buried here and us working so hard?"

"A radio's nice, it'd be all ours."

Just then a shadow fell across us.

"Hey, you kids, what you think you're doing?"

We turned. It was Mr. Kelly, the man who owned the empty

lot. "Oh, hello, Mr. Kelly," we said.

"Tell you what I want you to do," said Mr. Kelly. "I want you to take those shovels and take that soil and shovel it right back in that hole you been digging. That's what I want you to do."

My heart started beating fast again. I wanted to scream myself.

"But Mr. Kelly, there's a Screaming Woman and . . ."

"I'm not interested. I don't hear a thing."

"Listen!" I cried.

The scream.

Mr. Kelly listened and shook his head. "Don't hear nothing. Go on now, fill it up and get home with you before I give you my foot!"

We filled the hole all back in again. And all the while we filled it in, Mr. Kelly stood there, arms folded, and the woman screamed, but Mr. Kelly pretended not to hear it.

When we were finished, Mr. Kelly stomped off, saying, "Go on home now. And if I catch you here again . . ."

I turned to Dippy. "*He's* the one," I whispered.

"Huh?" said Dippy.

"He *murdered* Mrs. Kelly. He buried her here, after he strangled her, in a box, but she came to. Why he stood right here and she screamed and he wouldn't pay any attention."

"Hey," said Dippy. "That's right. He stood right here and lied to us."

"There's only one thing to do," I said. "Call the police and have them come arrest Mr. Kelly."

We ran for the corner store telephone.

The police knocked on Mr. Kelly's door five minutes later. Dippy and I were hiding in the bushes, listening.

"Mr. Kelly?" said the police officer.

"Yes, sir, what can I do for you?"

"Is Mrs. Kelly at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"May we see her, sir?"

"Of course. Hey, Anna!"

Mrs. Kelly came to the door and looked out. "Yes, sir?"

"I beg your pardon," apologized the officer. "We had a report that you were buried out in an empty lot, Mrs. Kelly. It sounded like a child made the call, but we had to be certain. Sorry to have troubled you."

"It's those blasted kids," cried Mr. Kelly, angrily. "If I ever catch them, I'll rip 'em limb from limb!"

"Cheezit!" said Dippy, and we both ran.

"What'll we do now?" I said.

"I got to go home," said Dippy. "Boy, we're really in trouble. We'll get a licking for this."

"But what about the Screaming Woman?"

"To heck with her," said Dippy. "We don't dare go near that empty lot again. Old man Kelly'll be waitin' around with his razor strap and lambast heck out'n us. An' I just happened to remember, Maggie. Ain't old man Kelly sort of deaf, hard-of-hearing?"

"Oh, my gosh," I said. "No *wonder* he didn't hear the screams."

"So long," said Dippy. "We sure got in trouble over your darn old Ventriloquist voice. I'll be seeing you."

I was left all alone in the world, no one to help me, no one to believe me at all. I just wanted to crawl down in that box with the Screaming Woman and die. The police were after me now, for lying to them, only I didn't know it was a lie, and my father was probably looking for me, too, or would be once he found my bed empty. There was only one last thing to do, and I did it.

I went from house to house, all down the street, near the empty lot. And I rang every bell and when the door opened I said: "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Griswold, but is anyone missing from your house?" or "Hello, Mrs. Pikes, you're looking fine today. Glad to see you *home.*" And once I saw that the lady of the house was home I just chatted a while, to be polite, and went on down the street.

The hours were rolling along. It was getting late. I kept thinking, oh, there's only so much air in that box with that woman under the earth, and if I don't hurry, she'll suffocate, and I got to rush! So I rang bells and knocked on doors, and it got later, and I was just about to give up and go home, when I knocked on the *last* door, which was the door of Mr. Charlie Nesbitt, who lives next to us. I kept knocking and knocking.

Instead of Mrs. Nesbitt, or Helen as my father calls her, coming to the door, why it was Mr. Nesbitt, Charlie, *himself.*

"Oh," he said. "It's you, Margaret."

"Yes," I said. "Good afternoon."

"What can I do for you, kid?" he said.

"Well, I thought I'd like to see your wife, Mrs. Nesbitt," I said.

"Oh," he said.

"May I?"

"Well, she's gone out to the store," he said.

"I'll wait," I said, and slipped in past him.

"Hey," he said.

I sat down in a chair. "My, it's a hot day," I said, trying to be calm, thinking about the empty lot and air going out of the box, and the screams getting weaker and weaker.

"Say, listen, kid," said Charlie,

coming over to me. "I don't think you better wait."

"Oh, sure," I said. "Why not?"

"Well, my wife won't be back," he said.

"Oh?"

"Not today, that is. She's gone to the store, like I said, but, but, she's going on from there to visit her mother. Yeah. She's going to visit her mother, in Schenectady. She'll be back, two or three days, maybe a week."

"That's a shame," I said.

"Why?"

"I wanted to tell her something."

"What?"

"I just wanted to tell her there's a woman buried over in the empty lot, screaming under tons and tons of dirt."

Mr. Nesbitt dropped his cigarette.

"You dropped your cigarette, Mr. Nesbitt," I pointed out, with my shoe.

"Oh, did I? Sure. So I did," he mumbled. "Well, I'll tell Helen when she comes home, your story. She'll be glad to hear it."

"Thanks. It's a real woman."

"How do you know it is?"

"I heard her."

"How, how you know it isn't, well, a *mandrake* root."

"What's that?"

"You know. A mandrake. It's a kind of a plant, kid. They scream. I know, I read it once. How you know it ain't a mandrake?"

"I never thought of that."

"You better start thinking," he said, lighting another cigarette. He tried to be casual. "Say, kid, you, eh, you *say* anything about this to anyone?"

"Sure, I told lots of people."

Mr. Nesbitt burned his hand on his match.

"Anybody doing anything about it?" he asked.

"No," I said. "They won't believe me."

He smiled. "Of course. Naturally. You're nothing but a kid. Why should they listen to you?"

"I'm going back now and dig her out with a spade," I said.

"Wait."

"I got to go," I said.

"Stick around," he insisted.

"Thanks, but no," I said, frantically.

He took my arm. "Know how to play cards, kid? Black jack?"

"Yes, sir."

He took out a deck of cards from a desk. "We'll have a game."

"I got to go dig."

"Plenty of time for that," he said, quiet. "Anyway, maybe my wife'll be home. Sure. That's it. You wait for her. Wait a while."

"You think she will be?"

"Sure, kid. Say, about that voice; is it very strong?"

"It gets weaker all the time."

Mr. Nesbitt sighed and smiled. "You and your kid games. Here

now, let's play that game of black jack, it's more fun than Screaming Women."

"I got to go. It's late."

"Stick around, you got nothing to do."

I knew what he was trying to do. He was trying to keep me in his house until the screaming died down and was gone. He was trying to keep me from helping her. "My wife'll be home in ten minutes," he said. "Sure. Ten minutes. You wait. You sit right there."

We played cards. The clock ticked. The sun went down the sky. It was getting late. The screaming got fainter and fainter in my mind. "I got to go," I said.

"Another game," said Mr. Nesbitt. "Wait another hour, kid. My wife'll come yet. Wait."

In another hour he looked at his watch. "Well, kid, I guess you can go now." And I know what his plan was. He'd sneak down in the middle of the night and dig up his wife, still alive, and take her somewhere else and bury her, good. "So long, kid. So long." He let me go, because he thought that by now the air must all be gone from the box.

The door shut in my face.

I went back near the empty lot and hid in some bushes. What could I do? Tell my folks? But they hadn't believed me. Call the police on Mr. Charlie Nesbitt? But he said his wife was away visiting. Nobody would believe me!

I watched Mr. Kelly's house. He wasn't in sight. I ran over to the place where the screaming had been and just stood there.

The screaming had stopped. It was so quiet I thought I would never hear a scream again. It was all over. I was too late, I thought.

I bent down and put my ear against the ground.

And then I heard it, way down, way deep, and so faint I could hardly hear it.

The woman wasn't screaming any more. She was singing.

Something about, "I loved you fair, I loved you well."

It was sort of a sad song. Very faint. And sort of broken. All of those hours down under the ground in that box, must have sort of made her crazy. All she needed was some air and food and she'd be all right. But she just kept singing, not wanting to scream any more, not caring, just singing.

I listened to the song.

And then I turned and walked straight across the lot and up the steps to my house and I opened the front door.

"Father," I said.

"So there you are!" he cried.

"Father," I said.

"You're going to get a licking," he said.

"She's not screaming any more."

"Don't talk about her!"

"She's singing now," I cried.

"You're not telling the truth!"

"Dad," I said. "She's out there and she'll be dead soon if you don't listen to me. She's out there, singing, and this is what she's singing." I hummed the tune. I sang a few of the words. "I loved you fair, I loved you well . . ."

Dad's face grew pale. He came and took my arm.

"What did you say?" he said.

I sang it again, "I loved you fair, I loved you well."

"Where did you *hear* that song?" he shouted.

"Out in the empty lot, just now."

"But that's *Helen's* song, the one she wrote, years ago, for *me!*" cried Father. "You *can't* know it. *Nobody* knew it, except Helen and me. I never sang it to anyone, not you or anyone."

"Sure," I said.

"Oh, my God!" cried Father, and ran out the door to get a shovel. The last I saw of him he was in the empty lot, digging, and lots of other people with him, digging.

I felt so happy I wanted to cry.

I dialed a number on the phone and when Dippy answered I said, "Hi, Dippy. Everything's fine. Everything's worked out keen. The Screaming Woman isn't screaming any more."

"Swell," said Dippy.

"I'll meet you in the empty lot with a shovel in two minutes," I said.

"Last one there's a monkey! So long!" cried Dippy.

"So long, Dippy!" I said, and ran.

A magazine whose avowed aim is to bring its readers the best in mystery fiction must ever be on the alert for the totally unexpected. For the totally unexpected—and all of the experts agree on this—is the warp-and-woof essence of a "surprise treat." And a surprise treat in truly magnificent setting is THE RED FOX OF THE CUMBERLANDS, *a brand new—hold your breath!—Leslie Charteris* true crime story *written with all the beguiling verve of a Saint saga lion-rampant. And so—just for next month—Simon Templar takes a well-merited vacation, and beneath his famed halo will be neither a reprint nor a new Saint yarn, but an actual account of a huge man possessed by the devil (or so it was claimed!) in a hillbilly murder mystery darkly enthralling.*

final hour

by . . . Norman Daniels

Matt's proudest possession was his decorative, expensive-looking wife. But when death comes tapping a gun is more dependable by far.

THERE WAS taste—not necessarily the owner's—and more than a hint of wealth investing that book-lined library. Some of the sets were almost priceless—and in this house, unread. The furniture was massive, leather-covered and comfortable. A few paintings hung on the one wall that wasn't book-lined. Nothing very good or very important. Matt Carrol's artistic preferences were more earthy than aesthetic.

He sat now, in the biggest of the deep leather chairs, his spine somewhere near the edge of the cushion, and his legs extended at full length. His eyes were closed, but not in sleep. There were too many tight wrinkles for sleep.

Opposite him sat Lily, his wife. Lily was carefully dressed, as usual, and her makeup was exactly right. She looked thirty without a doubt, but certainly not thirty-nine. Lily was Matt's proudest possession. He liked big houses and flashy cars, thick steaks and mellow brandy. But above all, he enjoyed having

A very prolific writer is Norman Daniels. His stories appear frequently on TV, and in an astonishingly large number of popular magazines, and so assured is his mastery of plot construction that his mystery yarns have served as models for a good many aspiring young practitioners in the genre. In this, his newest yarn, an almost unbearably exciting suspense situation precedes a climax as cold-bloodedly startling as a deathhead in a rose garden.

an expensive-looking, decorative wife. She was cool and poised and her background was of the best. Even a man as wealthy as Matt could appreciate her, especially since Matt's early girl friends had been Grand Street frills.

There was also a great deal of silence in the room—until the telephone rang. Matt hoisted himself up, suddenly wide awake and apprehensive. Lily also looked startled. She doubled her upper lip under her teeth and bit gently on it, ruining her lipstick.

Matt said, "Don't just sit there. Answer it."

She arose gracefully. He'd always liked the way she walked and he even appreciated it now. Lily picked up the phone just as it began to ring again. She murmured a greeting and stood there listening. Matt waved his hand at her. She nodded and he fell back into the chair. Lily hung up after a moment and stood beside the table.

"Him?" Matt asked.

"Yes," she said. "The same one. No question about it."

"He's nuts," Matt said savagely.

"He says there are only thirty minutes left, Matt. He said if you try to leave the building, he'll be waiting."

Matt ran his fingers through his thinning hair. "Who can he be? Are you sure you didn't recognize the voice?"

"Of course I'm sure. I told you that before."

"All right, all right," he said. "I'm sorry. What did he say the first time? What were his *exact* words?"

"I can't remember, Matt. Not word for word. But it was simple though. He hates you and he's going to kill you within an hour of his first call."

"Do you think I ought to phone the cops?" he asked.

"I told you what I thought," she replied. "You should have phoned them immediately."

"Yeah, I know. But I can't. They'd be sure to ask too many questions and too much would get out. I can't go to the cops. Lil, open the bottom drawer of that desk."

She walked behind the desk and opened the drawer. Her brows drew together in an uneasy frown. She straightened up, looking over at him.

"There's a gun," she said. "Just a gun."

"I know that. Bring it here."

"No," she said. "I hate guns. I couldn't stand touching one, Matt. I *won't* touch it."

"Oh, for Pete's sake," he grumbled and got up and took the .45 automatic out of the drawer. He socked a bullet into position, flicked the safety catch off, and laid the heavy weapon on a little table beside his chair. Then he sat down again.

"Who can it be?" he asked. "A

lot of people hate me. I've made more enemies than friends in this lousy business. But would any of them hate me enough to kill me? I can't figure it, Lil. I just can't."

"Perhaps," she said, smoothening the skirt over her knees, "it's Corcoran."

"He's crazy enough to try it," Matt agreed. "I should have paid him off, even if he did disobey orders and take his wife on that freighter we lost at sea."

"Corcoran thought the ship would burn, not blow up," Lily said matter-of-factly. "I hardly blame him for being angry."

"No, he's been half-baked since it happened. But he hasn't the nerve. Know who it may be, Lil? Jenal—Otto Jenal. I busted that crummy little syndicate he ran and he never forgot, or forgave me. Jenal knows how to use a gun. Lil, did he say he'd shoot me?"

"No, Matt. Only that he'd kill you."

Matt said, "When he comes through that door I'll blow him apart. Warner—remember Warner? Yeah, how could you forget? The little rat used to be your boy friend and we cut him down to size. He threatened me once —two years ago."

Lily said, "If it's Warner, look out. I knew him well enough to know what he's capable of. He can do it, Matt."

Matt got up. "I'm going crazy," he said. "That guy's driving me out of my mind. How long since he called?"

"We've been talking for five minutes."

"We don't even know his deadline because you forgot to look at the clock when he said I'd die before an hour was up. Lil, for heaven's sake, why can't you be more efficient? We don't know how much time we've got left."

She looked with somber deliberation at him. "I'm sorry, Matt. I don't get death threats over the phone very often."

"Maybe," Matt said, "he's from way back. One of the muscle boys I used to run with. Yeah —a lot of them carry grudges."

"This man spoke very well," Lily said. "He had a nice voice. It was none of your old gangster friends."

"Well, it's got to be somebody," he cried in desperation. "And I've a feeling he means it. Lil, I'm scared. I've always been scared to die. Lil, we've got to do something."

"There's still the police, Matt."

"No. They'd cheer for the punk who killed me. I've made them look cheap too often. In fact, it could even be a cop. I know a dozen who'd like to see me dead."

"Matt, you're getting upset. Your face is red. Remember the

doctor warned against excitement."

"Well, have him tell the screwball who threatened me. Have him tell—"

The phone seemed to possess four bells, all very big. Lily answered it calmly enough. This time it was a very brief monologue on the part of the caller. Lil hung up slowly.

"He said he'll wait out front for a few minutes. But if you try to use the trade entrance in back, he'll know it. He says you can come out if you like."

Matt strode to the window, pulled the drape back and looked down eight stories to the sidewalk, and the lamppost across the street.

"If I get a look at this screwball, I'll know what to do. You know, I could even pick him off from up here? That gun would do it."

"How would you explain it to the police, Matt?" she warned. "They wouldn't believe you about the threat."

Matt let the drape fall back and walked to the table where a quart bottle of whiskey waited. He drank some of it straight, seeking the artificial courage it sometimes gives a man. Liquor had never worked that way with him.

"For Pete's sake," he said acidly, "don't sit there as if you're already at my funeral."

"I can't think of much to say under the circumstances," Lily said. "Our mysterious friend has done all of the talking."

Matt went to the window again, looked out and then turned around with an agonized expression on his face. "Do you think he'll go through with it?"

"How would I know?" she asked.

"You talked to him. You heard his voice. A voice means a lot—what a guy puts into it. Did he sound sincere?"

"Yes. Yes, he did."

Matt sat down again. "Lil, if I stay here, he'll get in somehow. If I leave, he'll meet me. What am I going to do?" He bounded to his feet again and went back to the window. He spoke in a hoarse whisper, as if he feared his voice would carry through the pane of glass and all the way down to the street. "Lil, he's here. That's him!"

She came to his side and looked down. A tall man in an olive drab lightweight topcoat and a gray hat, stood directly under the street light. They realized at once that unless he tilted his head far back and looked up, it would be impossible to see his face.

"Warner," Matt said. "That's Warner as sure as . . ."

"He's too tall—and slender," Lily said. "Matt, I'm getting scared too. If he comes here and kills you, he'll have to kill me."

"Why don't you blow, then?

Oh, no . . . no. I'll go nuts if I'm alone. I couldn't stand it, but—you've got to get out of here, baby. He won't stop you. Chances are he won't even know who you are."

"I'm staying here," she said.

"That gets you the diamond and ruby clip you wanted. Thanks, baby. How much time, approximately?"

"Fifteen or sixteen minutes. Do you think if he comes in here—you can shoot first?"

"Ten years ago I'd have said yes. Now I'm not so sure. I'm no kid any more. My reflexes are shot."

She went over and sat on the arm of his chair and smoothed his rumpled hair. "Relax, darling. You're terribly upset. If he catches you this way, you won't have a chance."

"I won't have one no matter what shape I'm in. That guy means business. He wouldn't call that often if he didn't. Lil, go see if he's still out there."

She slid off the chair arm, and walked in front of him on her way to the window. He wanted to reach out and touch her. He'd always been fascinated by any nearness of her. She was nothing short of wonderful. She was expensive, all right, but he'd known that right from the first. Expensive and worth it. If only he didn't have to die in the next few minutes.

He was going to die. He knew it. He'd lived in dread of it for two decades and now, when he'd quit the rackets and retired from the legit activities he'd set up, this terror was even harder to take. It was as if someone was going to rob him of everything he'd fought so hard to accumulate.

He groaned, his lips working.

From the window, Lil said, "He just looked up, Matt. Wait—stay there. His head is down again. He looked at his wristwatch twice."

"You saw his face?" Matt asked eagerly. "Lil, did you recognize him?"

"No—but he's an ugly man. A great big face all twisted on one side—though I could have been mistaken. It's hard to see at that distance."

"Thorne," Matt's voice and face were hollow. "From the old days—with a fifteen-year grudge. I helped bust his face in a fight that was forced on us. I told you about him once, remember? We damn near killed him and I wish we had."

"He looks," Lily shuddered for the first time, "completely vicious."

"He's bad, Lil. He's so bad—well, I know how he operates, how he kills. With a gun, yes. But he has his own way of using it—"

"Shall I call the police, darling?"

She moved toward the phone,

but Matt quickly stepped in front of her.

"No, we can't. Thorne knows too much. Some of the stuff—well, it's not covered by the statute of limitations. The cops would eat it up. I can't afford the cops."

He was haggard with fear and indecision. He wanted to crawl into her arms and stay there and if Thorne came, he'd still feel secure. It was funny, going back that way. As a child he'd always thought no one could hurt him so long as his mother held him. Now it was Lil he needed. It was all crazy. He got up and went to the window.

The street light shone on the sidewalk only. "He's gone," Matt said in a wheezy voice. "Lil—he's on his way up here now."

She bit her lip again and covered her face with one hand. He went to her, gently touched her shoulder. "Lil, I'm the worst kind of a yellow rat. I've always been a coward. Sometimes I *had* to hurt people because if I didn't, they'd know I was afraid. I can't take this. I just can't take it."

"The door is locked," she said.

"Locked? He'll get it open in twenty seconds. That man's as vicious as you say he looks. He knows every trick!"

The jangle of the phone sent Matt reeling back as though he'd already been shot. He opened his mouth as if to scream and stood rigidly staring while Lil picked up the phone.

After a moment, she covered the mouthpiece with her hand. "He wants to talk to you, Matt. He says he wants to tell you personally that the hour is almost up."

"No," Matt said. "No, I won't talk to him. I can't. Tell him I'll give him money. Tell him the place is full of cops—anything. Only make him go away. Lil, make him go away."

He whimpered as he dropped into the big chair. He bent forward until his forehead touched his knees. Lil put the phone down and came over.

"He said he is on his way up now. I couldn't tell him those things because he wouldn't have believed them anyway. Matt, you have two or three minutes. He'll kill me too."

Matt reached out, touched the gun and shuddered as he drew his hand back. He looked up at her with eyes that had turned bleak and chill. There was an animal-like snarl on his lips, but it was a grimace of fear, not of anger.

Lily said, "I'll let him in, Matt."

"No," he croaked. "No!"

"But you said he couldn't be kept out. I'll talk to him, Matt. I'll try to reason with him."

"That man doesn't know the meaning of reason or mercy. Lil,

can you shoot a gun? Can you kill him?"

"No. I couldn't shoot even if I was sure I was going to die. No, Matt."

"Why didn't I foresee this?" he said bitterly. "A muscle boy wouldn't have cost much. It's too late now. Everything's too late. What am I going to do?"

He groped for her hand, found it and continued to hold it until she gently tried to pull it away. "Matt, I'm going out there and face him. I have to."

His grip tightened. "He'll kill you. That's all he likes to do. Killing gives him pleasure. He was always like that—a brutal, senseless killer. Then he'll come and get me. Lil, stay here. Please stay here."

She freed her hand. "I have to go now. He should be almost at the door."

He fell back in the chair, saying nothing, too numbed by terror to feel very much, or even to think straight. She walked with astonishing grace toward the door. Just a slight ripple of the hips and yet her whole body seemed in perfect rhythm. There was a woman, he thought.

As she reached the door opening into the adjoining living-room the chimes rang out. He was already there. She turned and looked back at Matt. She shook her head slowly and then continued on. She crossed the long living-room and moved into the foyer. The chimes rang again. She stood by the front door for a moment, her hand on the knob. Then she opened it, and he came in.

He said, "What was the idea of making me wait across the street?"

"Come inside," she said. "I think he wants to see you."

"How'd he take it, when you told him?"

"He's pretty upset about it," she replied, quickly. "Morose and upset."

They entered the living-room. Lily gave him a sudden, startled look and ran to a long table. She pulled open the drawer.

"A gun!" she screamed. "He has a gun!" She opened her mouth and really screamed then, until she realized what she was doing and jammed a balled-up fist against her lips, smothering the cry abruptly. The young man hurried to her side.

The shot sounded muffled. The young man cried out in horror and ran to the library. He opened the door, then closed it again quickly. She came into his arms.

"Stay out of there," he said. "He's killed himself. Darling, if I thought he'd take your leaving him this way—"

"He wasn't well," she said. "I—was afraid of it. Terribly afraid, Sam."

"I'll better call the police," he said.

"Please do," she said and sank into one of the petit-point chairs. He watched her, fascinated by the remarkable grace she possessed. He reached for the phone, but before he could lift the receiver, it rang. He glanced at her.

"Answer it, Sam," she said.

He put the instrument to his ear, said "hello" and listened a moment. He scowled up at her. "It's some guy who says Tumbril was second in the fifth at Hialeah."

"He—he spread a lot of money on bets today," she said. "His bookmaker has been phoning every few minutes for the last hour or so."

"Poor chump," Sam said. He picked up the phone again. "He didn't bring home any winners today. I'll get the police now."

She was watching Sam. He was a handsome fellow, but something had to be done about his teeth. Porcelain jackets—that would do it. The right teeth and he'd be just what she wanted. She could tolerate nothing short of perfection in a man.

DEATH STOPS AT A TOURIST CAMP

By LESLIE FORD

If you like your mystery heroines to be scared pea-green right at the start and a tiny white tourist cabin under a crimson rambler seems the one perfect setting for a murder, and if a scream in the night—but why quibble? The short novel you'll soon be reading, as you must have clairvoyantly realized, is DEATH STOPS AT A TOURIST CAMP, *by Leslie Ford in our very next issue. And naturally you're elated, for a Leslie Ford mystery never fails to quicken the pulse with a rare, heady kind of excitement and to linger in the mind long after it has been read and enjoyed to the last breathless exclamation point.*

murder at the race track

by . . . Frank Gruber

Johnny Fletcher couldn't always pick the winners on the golden, gleaming turf. But when Death set the odds his judgment blazed.

JOHNNY FLETCHER'S heap wasn't the best car in Los Angeles County, but it wasn't the worst by a considerable margin. There were probably five or six that were not nearly as good as Johnny's . . . but they were all in *Ye Olde Museumme of Anciente Carres.* Johnny's was wheezing along the highway. In fact, he was right now turning into the vast parking lot adjacent to the California Race Park.

Johnny coasted the heap to a halt near one of the parking lot ticket sellers, and turned to his friend and companion, Sam Cragg. "Give the man a half dollar," he said. "Go on, give."

Sam exclaimed, "I ain't got a half buck left." He held up *Bob's Blue Tip Sheet* persuasively. "I bought this, you know."

"Oh, fine," said Johnny. "Just fine." He thrust a hand into his trousers' pocket and fished out some change. He counted out a quarter, two dimes and five pennies and tendered them to the ticket seller.

The man slipped a ticket un-

Few mystery writers have been quite as prolific as Frank Gruber and fewer still have published so many novels which have become smash hits on television and the silver screen. Since his first mystery novel, THE FRENCH KEY, *skyrocketed him to fame thirty-seven titles have appeared under his name, and twenty million copies of his books have been sold in the U. S. alone. He has never created a more popular character than Johnny Fletcher, and here is Johnny in a freshly-minted crime saga superlatively told—his* first *appearance in a shorter than book-length novel. Naturally we're a bit proud.*

der the broken windshield wiper. "You going to be able to start this again when you leave?"

"If I can't, you have my permission to run her in the third race tomorrow," retorted Johnny.

He manipulated the gear shift lever and The Heap hurtled forward. It was a fairly quiet day for the race track and Johnny found a parking space about halfway down the lot, and only a quarter of a mile from the clubhouse.

He gathered up the *Racing Form,* the four daily newspapers, *Bob's Blue Tip Sheet, Joe's Pink Sheet, Mike's Green Sheet* and *The Daily Winner.* He gestured toward the carton on the back seat.

"You bring the books, Sam," he said easily.

"Why can't we just leave them here?" exclaimed Sam. "Nobody's going to steal them."

"I hate to tell you this, Sam," Johnny retorted, "but unless we sell some of those books we aren't going to see any races today. I've got thirty cents in my pocket. How much have you got?"

Sam groaned. "Twenty."

"And it costs a buck-ten per each to get inside. So . . ."

"I see what you mean."

Sam reached into the tonneau of The Heap and picked up the rather large carton. It weighed exactly forty-five pounds, but Sam handled it easily, carelessly. He wasn't too happy, but then, who is ever really?

"Where?" he asked.

Johnny sized up the situation. "Mmm, the place is lousy with cops up front. I guess right here is as good as anywhere."

Sam set down the carton, and peeled off his coat. Then he unbuttoned his shirt and slipped it off, revealing the torso of a man who could have given Lord Blears an interesting time. As a matter of fact, Sam Cragg could have thrown Lord Blears in two straight falls, if he had been so inclined. He wasn't—and besides, that wrestling gentleman was nowhere in evidence.

He piled his coat and shirt neatly beside the carton. Opening the latter he took out a six-foot length of chain and handed it to Johnny Fletcher.

Two or three race-bound people had already stopped when Sam started to peel off his coat and shirt. Johnny signaled to them to come closer, then opened his mouth and began talking in a carefully modulated voice that could be heard clearly and distinctly by anyone within three-sixteenth of a mile.

"Ladeez and gentlemen," he announced, "you are about to witness the most amazing exhibition of strength it has ever been your pleasure to behold. Standing beside me is none other than Young Samson. And who is

Young Samson, as if you didn't know? Young Samson, my friends, is the strongest man in the world. I say this without bias, without favor or prejudice, and in all due modesty, for we are going to prove it to you in just one moment. Watch! Watch closely, ladies and gentlemen . . ."

By this time at least a dozen people had halted before Johnny and Sam and more were heading toward the group as fast as they could park their cars and emerge into the wide center aisle leading to the clubhouse and grandstand.

Talking was Johnny Fletcher's stock in trade. He had a fine, ringing voice when he let it roll out. It was a cheerful voice and an honest one. It engendered confidence in people and it made them reach into their pockets and pull out folding money . . . sometimes.

He held up the chain that Sam had given him a few moments before. "Do you see this chain, ladies and gentlemen? It is made of the finest Toledo, Ohio, steel and is commonly used in logging camps for uprooting trees and then binding together the logs for shipping to the mill. Not for the really big logs, of course, just the small and medium-sized logs. It is a strong chain, however—mighty, mighty strong. Not even a horse could break it. A human being, *never!*"

By now there were thirty or forty persons gathered closely around Johnny and Sam and Johnny paused for effect. Sam muttered something under his breath and Johnny leaned forward to catch it.

"What's that, Young Samson? You think *you* could break this chain—just by expanding your chest? Ridiculous, Young Samson! As strong as you are you couldn't do it—no human being could. What? You want to try it? Very well . . ."

Quickly Johnny slipped the chain about Sam's massive torso, and twisted it into a knot on his chest. "Wait—wait just a minute!"

Stooping, Johnny reached into the carton at his feet and took out a handful of books. "In one moment, folks, in just one moment, Young Samson's going to attempt something no human being could possibly do. He's going to try to break that chain. Of course he can't do it. No living mortal could, but . . . what if he *could,* what if Young Samson just *could* break that chain? Would you believe then that he's the strongest human being in this great world of ours?"

Again he paused and this time he held one of the books over his head. "This is it, folks, this little book here contains all the secrets that took Young Samson, a puny, human weakling weighing barely ninety-five pounds and transformed him into a man weighing

two hundred and twenty pounds, a man who can break logging chains—if he can do it—by merely expanding his chest.

"It's all here, folks, all the secrets of health and strength and vigor, the same secrets that can make you and you and you—" he pointed quickly at various men in the crowd—"as strong as Young Samson. Young Samson, are you ready?"

Sam Cragg went into a crouch. He let out his breath, clenched his fists and began to draw in air, rising slowly to the balls of his feet, to his toes. The chain about his chest tightened. Sam gasped, tensed and took more air into his lungs. And then—

The chain snapped!

A link broke under the pressure and the chain flew away from Sam, almost striking Johnny Fletcher before it clanked to the macadam pavement.

Johnny let out a roar. "He did it, folks! Young Samson broke the chain—the chain that no human being *could* break. He did it because he's the strongest man in the entire world. And here it is, folks, the book that showed him the way—the book that can make *you,* and *you,* and *you* as strong as Samson.

"It's yours for a paltry pittance, the infinitesimal sum of only two dollars and ninety-five cents. Please have your change ready, because we've only got a few minutes to sell these books. You're all anxious to get into the park in time for the first race and so am I. I've got a tip on *Anxious Betty* in the first. Yes, sir, two ninety-five, plus tax makes it an even three dollars. Thank you, sir, and thank you. Yes, madam, buy the book for your boy friend? Thank you!"

Grabbing up an extra armful of books from the crowd, Johnny assaulted the people in front of him. He thrust books into hesitating hands, gathered in money, made change swiftly. Sam, meanwhile, put on his shirt and coat.

Johnny sold books. He sold a lot of them, for when he was right there was no better salesman than Johnny Fletcher. And he was right today. Also, he had a good audience, a sporting crowd on the way to the track to take a chance on a good thing. They took a chance on Johnny and Sam—and the book, EVERY MAN A SAMSON.

The crowd dwindled rapidly. Not all of the pitch-customers bought books, but enough of them did to give Johnny thirty-nine dollars. He was left with three books, which Sam tossed back into The Heap.

A few minutes later, Johnny and Sam bought their tickets and programs and moved on into the clubhouse, squandering two-twenty each instead of the dollar-ten for which they could have purchased tickets for the grandstand.

They reached their seats and Johnny quickly scanned the "tote" board. "*Anxious Betty,* nine to one. That's great!" he enthused. "I'll get a ten-dollar win ticket right away."

"Johnny Fletcher!" cried a voice behind Johnny and Sam. "Johnny Fletcher, by all that's holy!"

Johnny whirled. A florid-faced man of about forty was bearing down on him, his hand outthrust.

"Bill Fine!" exclaimed Johnny. "I thought you'd be working the state fairs by now."

"I was, Johnny, I was. But I got a week off in between fairs, and I thought I'd run over here and make a pile. I got some good ones, Johnny. Oh, I got some good ones today! What're you betting?"

"*Anxious Betty* in the first!"

"Oh, no!" cried Bill Fine. "*Anxious Betty's* a dog. She hasn't got a chance."

"That's what you think," retorted Johnny. "It so happens I got this one straight from *Anxious Betty's* owner . . ."

Bill Fine shot a quick look over his shoulders. "Harry Potter's a crook, Johnny. I'm telling you. He's a two-bit conniving thief and he's in with a crowd that would steal the fillings out of your teeth."

"Now, wa-ait a minute, Bill!" exclaimed Johnny. "I've met Harry Potter and he looked like a pretty decent sort. He told me last night at the hotel—"

"What hotel?"

"The Eagle Hotel on Hollywood Boulevard."

"The Eagle Hotel! I knew it. Johnny, what's the matter with you? You used to be a pretty sharp lad. Don't you know that the Eagle Hotel's one of the shadiest joints in town? The sharpies use it as their headquarters. They run races there the night before. I'm telling you, Harry Potter's a crook. If you bet on *Anxious Betty* you're throwing your money to the birds."

"It's post time," groaned Johnny. "I was all set on *Anxious Betty . . .*"

"I'm going to put two bucks on her," Sam Cragg said suddenly.

Bill Fine seemed to notice Sam Cragg for the first time. "Oh, it's you, Cragg." He winked at Johnny. "I see you're still lettin' the big boy tag along with you."

Sam Cragg bared his teeth. "I never did like you, Bill Fine. Now, I know I'm going to take a sock at you!"

"Sam," exclaimed Johnny. "Don't start a fight. Not now. Here—take this ten bucks. Get a ticket on—all right, Fine. If not *Anxious Betty . . .* who?"

"*Curly Bill,*" whispered Fine. "I got this right from the feed bag. Sink it on *Curly Bill*—on

the nose. He'll pay twenty dollars and he'll walk away from this field of pigs. *Anxious Betty* —pah!"

"Curly Bill," said Johnny to Sam. "Get a ten-dollar win ticket on *Curly Bill."*

Sam trotted off to the betting room to buy the ticket. Down on the track the horses were moving up to the starting gates. The announcer said, over the loudspeaker system: "The horses are at the post!"

"Watch him, Johnny," enthused Bill Fine. *"Curly Bill*— Number Ten. And I've got a sweet one for you in the second race. Stay right here. I want to make a last-minute check with the owner before I give you the office."

Bill Fine hurried off and Johnny sat down to watch the horses. Sam was coming down the steps as the announcer cried out: "They're off!"

A roar went up in the crowds as the horses tore down the backstretch.

Sam thrust several tickets at Johnny. "You only gave me ten bucks, Johnny. You know I wanted to bet a deuce on *Anxious Betty."*

"We're saving the money. Hey, look! *Curly Bill's* two lengths in front already."

Sam looked at the horses, then frowned. "I might as well tell you now, Johnny. I only bought you four two-dollar tickets on *Curly Bill.* I put two on *Anxious Betty."*

"Anxious Betty, hell!" cried Johnny. "She's next to last!"

The horses were now making the far turn and *Anxious Betty* was moving swiftly up on the outside. They came into the stretch with *Anxious Betty* neck-and-neck with *Curly Bill.*

Then, down the stretch!

Anxious Betty passed *Curly Bill.* Number Seven passed *Curly Billy,* Number Two passed him. *Anxious Betty* drew away from the field, was almost immediately two lengths ahead, three. And *Curly Bill* was falling back.

Anxious Betty crossed the wire five lengths in front of the field. *Curly Bill,* hopelessly outrun, finished dead last.

Bill Fine came dashing down the steps. "Johnny! Johnny!" he cried hysterically. "I tried to get here in time. The crowd was so thick—"

"You and your tips!" snarled Johnny Fletcher. "You touted me off the winner onto that dog that ran last."

"That's what I tried to tell you. I saw Charr Mechem. He owns *Curly Bill.* He made a last-minute deal. He swapped *Curly Bill* for a horse in the second. He—he looked for me and couldn't find me, on account of I was down here. I had fifty on *Curly Bill* myself."

Sam riffled through the five two-dollar tickets. He held up

one. *"Anxious Betty!"* He sneered at Bill Fine. "See? *You* take these!" He thrust the *Curly Bill* tickets at Bill Fine.

"I'm sorry, Johnny," Bill Fine rattled on. "I really tried to get back here in time to tell you to get on *Anxious Betty*. I just couldn't make it. But I'll make up for it. *Hopewell* in the second. Charr Mechem's horse."

"Come to think of it," said Johnny Fletcher bitterly, "where did you get to know all these horse people? This isn't your territory."

"Horses are horses. The boys run in California today, in Illinois next week. I've known Charr Mechem for ten years. Did him a mighty big favor once and he lets me in on his deals all the time. And it's *Hopewell* in the second. Got it, Johnny, *Hopewell?"*

"I heard it," Johnny said grimly. "But I think I'll go down to the stables and have a little talk with Harry Potter. His dope on *Anxious Betty* was all right."

"Talk to him," said Bill Fine. "Talk to him if you've got to. But remember—I warned you. Let him tout you onto some dog in the second and then take it out on him after *Hopewell* romps home."

"Yah!" jeered Sam.

"Oh," said Bill Fine, "the fat boy makes noises, does he? Have you taught him how to speak any words, Johnny?"

Johnny caught Sam's arm to keep him from clouting Fine. They climbed up the stairs. There Sam held back. "The prices just went up—twelve-forty for *Anxious Betty*. I'm goin' in to cash my ticket."

"All right," said Johnny. "I'll meet you back here. I'm going to run down and have a talk with Harry Potter."

He went through the clubhouse, and out to the paddock. "Seen Harry Potter?" he asked a guard.

The man shook his head. "Not since he sent his nag to the post. Hey, you ain't allowed back here."

"I'm looking for Harry. He's a friend of mine. He asked me to come back after the race."

"Well, all right. Maybe he's rubbing down *Anxious Betty*. Stall Number Twenty-two."

Johnny went down the line of stalls, passing exercise boys, owners, trainers, touts and race track employees. He reached Stall Number 22 and called inside: "Harry? Harry Potter!"

There was no response. Johnny, looking over the lower half of the stable door, was surprised to find the stall empty. His brows drew together in a puzzled frown. Barring some unusual trackside delay, *Anxious Betty* should be back by now.

He started to draw back, then did a sudden take, and leaned far into the stall. Then, exclaim-

ing softly, he whipped open the stall door and strode into the little room.

A man was lying at the right side of the stall, face down. Johnny stepped quickly to his side, dropped to both knees. A cry was torn from his throat.

"Harry!"

Harry Potter made no reply. He couldn't. He was dead.

II

Johnny Fletcher sprang to his feet. This was no place for him. The quicker he got out the better. Let the body be discovered by someone else—

He stepped to the door and froze. A horse's head appeared in the doorway, then more slowly the head and shoulders of a man.

The man exclaimed, "Who're you?"

"Nobody," gulped Johnny. "I was just passing and—"

But the man had already looked past Johnny. "Here—what've you done to Harry Potter?" he exclaimed, his eyes wide.

Johnny groaned. "All right, he's dead. I—I think he's been murdered."

"He's been mur—" began the man with the horse. Then he let out a sharp cry. "Help—murder! Harry Potter's been murdered!"

There was a sudden scurrying outside the stall. Boots pounded gravel. Voices chattered, yelped and cried out. Faces appeared, and almost immediately thereafter—uniforms. And Johnny Fletcher was shoved and hauled and pushed about. Finally, a policeman with some rank faced him.

"Well," he said, "let's have it."

"There's nothing to tell. I came down to see Harry Potter—"

"Why?" the policeman demanded.

"Uh, no special reason. Well, yes, I came to thank him for giving me a tip on *Anxious Betty.*"

"Oh, you knew Potter?"

"He's staying at the same hotel."

"What hotel's that?"

"The Eagle Hotel, on Hollywood Boulevard."

The policeman's face showed distaste. "That fleabag!"

"I'll tell 'em you called their hotel a fleabag."

The policeman's eyes glowed. "A wise guy, eh?"

"N-no, not at all," replied Johnny. "Like I said, I scarcely knew Potter. I met him in the hotel last night and he said he had a horse that he thought could win the first today. I—I just came back here to thank him and —found him like that!"

Some fifty feet away, a woman's scream rose above the chattering noise around the stables. A sudden hush fell upon the

crowd and the woman—a girl—came running forward.

"Dad!" she sobbed. "Dad!"

The policeman sprang away from Johnny. He caught the girl in front of the stall, and prevented her from entering. "Easy, Miss," he advised, gently. "It won't help any to—to look at him."

"W-who could do such a thing!" wailed the girl. "Dad was the finest man who ever lived. He didn't have an enemy in the world." A sob wracked her slender figure. "Today, of all times, when his horse finally won."

"Your father had only the one horse?"

The girl nodded. "He had another, but it was claimed a few weeks ago. His—his hopes were on *Anxious Betty*. And today *Betty* won and . . . and Dad . . ." She turned away, choking back another sob. Then suddenly she whirled back.

"Who did it?"

"I don't know," said the policeman. "We're questioning this man."

The girl turned on Johnny Fletcher. Her eyes, he saw, were of the deepest blue. Her face, tear-stained, was of the smoothest texture he had ever seen. In spite of her agitated condition she was a very beautiful girl. Young, not more than twenty-one or twenty-two. Johnny liked them that age. Although he also liked them younger and older.

Her eyes, as they regarded Johnny, were not friendly. "Who are you?" she demanded.

"My name's Johnny Fletcher. Harry—your father—and I had a talk at the hotel last night."

"You're one of King Morgan's crowd!" she accused.

Johnny shook his head. "I don't know any King Morgan."

"I do," said the policeman calmly. He was thoughtful as he looked at the girl. "Your father was a friend of King Morgan?"

She hesitated, then nodded. "Morgan called on him yesterday morning. They—they had words."

A sleek, clean-shaven man in a loud sport coat and dove-colored trousers came through the crowd. "Did somebody mention my name?" he asked.

The policeman frowned. "Yes, Mr. Morgan. I understand you visited with Harry Potter yesterday."

"Any law against that?"

"There's a law against murder," the policeman said testily.

King Morgan regarded the policeman calmly. "Are you accusing me of murder?"

The policeman swallowed hard. "Harry Potter's been murdered and it's my job to get to the bottom of it."

Deliberately, Morgan turned his back on the policeman. He said to Harry Potter's daughter:

"Miss Potter, I'm sorry about your father. He was a fine man. A gentleman. I thought a lot of Harry Potter."

A white-haired man, wearing a pin-stripe suit, came bustling forward. He was the club steward, F. Godfrey Hamling. "Couldn't we continue this in my office?" he asked the policeman. "It—it's bad for the morale of the patrons."

The policeman's forehead creased. "I don't know, Mr. Hamling. I think I ought to take all these people down to the station."

"No-no, you mustn't do that!" cried the steward. "The publicity would hurt the track. This is extremely unfortunate. Nothing like this has ever happened and I—I don't know what to make of it. The board of directors will take a serious view of it."

"Very well, Mr. Hamling," conceded the policeman, "let's go to your office." He pointed at Johnny Fletcher. "You come along. Also you, Mr. Morgan. And the trainer—" He snapped his fingers.

The man who had caught Johnny Fletcher inside the stall with the dead man stepped forward. "Bass, Bob Bass."

"Bass. Come along. Miss Potter . . ."

The designated people started through the crowd toward the clubhouse. They had gone scarcely fifty feet when Sam Cragg and Bill Fine came into view. Sam looked startled when he saw the policeman at Johnny's elbow.

"Johnny, are you pinched?" he cried.

Johnny looked inquiringly at the policeman. "Am I?"

The man scowled. "Not yet."

Bill Fine came forward. "Did you follow my advice Johnny? Are you down on *Hopewell?*"

Johnny thrust his hand into his pocket, and brought out all the bills that remained. "*Hopewell,* Sam," he said. "All of it."

"I like *Brass Monkey.*"

"Put it on *Hopewell,*" Johnny reiterated. "Do like I tell you. I'll see you later."

In the steward's office, Lieutenant Blum, the policeman, held forth for an hour. He questioned Johnny at great length. He questioned Helen Potter, King Morgan and Bob Bass. He questioned stable employees. Another police lieutenant came in then and huddled with Lieutenant Blum and the two of them then questioned everyone all over again.

The net result of the police questioning was—nothing. The sixth race had been run when Johnny Fletcher finally was permitted to leave the steward's office.

In the clubhouse, Johnny hurried down to the seats which he had bought for himself and Sam Cragg and which he had occupied for less than five minutes.

He found Sam scowling over the *Racing Form.*

"What happened?" Johnny cried.

"Nothing much," said Sam gloomily. "What happened to you?"

Johnny made an impatient gesture. "*Hopewell* in the second! How much did he pay?"

"Two-twenty—to show. He came in third."

"Oh, no!" wailed Johnny. He dropped limply into the seat beside Sam Cragg. Then he rallied. "That money you won on *Anxious Betty*—let me have it."

Sam pretended not to hear. He frowned at the *Racing Form.* Johnny struck him on the shoulder with the flat of his hand. "Your money, Sam!"

"What money? I put a fiver on *The Limping Goose* in the third. Well, she limped, all right. In the fourth—" he brightened, "I had a winner. Only paid six-eighty, but I picked him all by myself, *Snow Man.*"

"All right, all *right,* Sam!" cried Johnny. "Then you ought to have some money left."

"Bill Fine," Sam said bitterly. "He came here in time for the fifth race. He touted me onto another nag of Charr Mechem's."

Johnny groaned. "Damn Charr Mechem and double-damn Bill Fine! I should have let you smack Fine right at the beginning when you wanted to. Why'd you let him do it, after the dirty cracks he made about you?"

"I dunno, Johnny," Sam said miserably. "I guess I'm a weak character. Just like you. You let everybody and his uncle tout you."

"I got touted right into the middle of a murder," snarled Johnny.

"I heard about that," said Sam. "Somebody knocked off the owner of *Anxious Betty.* But, uh, what've you got to do with that?"

"Nothing," snapped Johnny. "Not one damn thing—except that they think I did it."

"You didn't, Johnny. You never killed anybody. I know that. You're not the type."

"Fine! I'll use you for a character witness."

Sam's face showed genuine concern. "If they think you did it, how come they didn't take you down to the clink?"

"Because the police haven't got any evidence. Harry Potter was shot with a thirty-two and they haven't found the gun yet. Of course they think I threw it away. They turned me loose, but they're keeping an eye on me. That you can be sure of."

III

The Eagle Hotel wasn't exactly a flophouse. A fairly recent sand-blasting job on the outside

and a quick once-over painting of the hotel lobby kept it from the flophouse category. But the establishment was long, long past its prime and now catered to tourists who couldn't afford the rates at the better motels and to a local clientele of race track hangers-on, broken-down wrestlers and the boys who made a fast buck here and a quick fifty cents there.

The hotel manager, who doubled as the night clerk, knew all the answers. A plastic suitcase, loaded with bricks, never got as far as the elevators. And the "I'm - expecting - a - letter - with - a - check" routine got its user nothing but a silent, mirthless laugh.

He held up his index finger as Johnny and Sam entered the lobby and started for the elevator. "Mr. Fletcher, a moment please!" He was very polite, up to a point.

Johnny detoured toward the desk. "My week isn't up until tomorrow," he began defensively.

"Right, sir," said the hotel man, Mr. Detterback. "That wasn't why I stopped you. It's the police, sir. They telephoned and—and well, sir, one of them was here only a half hour ago. He asked a great many questions about you."

"And?"

"What could I tell him? Nothing. I know nothing about you. Except that you've been here for six days and—and have rather poor luggage."

"It's nothing," said Johnny. "Nothing at all. They think I killed a man, but that's all."

"All!" exclaimed Mr. Detterback. "My dear sir, that's quite a lot. I, ah, I have the reputation of this hotel to think about."

"Very laudable," retorted Johnny. "Get rid of the questionable characters and what'll you have? A hotel full of empty rooms."

"I resent that!"

"I've had a hard day," Johnny said wearily, "and I may have a rough night. If you don't mind, I'd like to go up to my room—if you can call it a room—and have a nice, quiet nap."

"Very well, Fletcher," said Mr. Detterback nastily. "You've got the room until tomorrow. And then—twelve dollars, or else." He gave Johnny a hard look.

Johnny rejoined Sam, who had waited near the elevators. "What'd he want, Johnny?" Sam asked anxiously. "The rent?"

"No. We've got plenty of time for that. To be precise—until tomorrow!"

They got into the elevator and the operator whistled softly, tunelessly, as he took them up to the fifth floor. They got out then, and walked to the end of the corridor. Johnny put the key into the lock of Room 509 and

to his surprise, found the door unlocked.

The reason was quickly apparent when he pushed open the door and saw a heavily-jowled man sitting in the rocking chair near the window. The man got up as Johnny and Sam came in.

"Hi, fellas," he said. "The monicker's Floyd—Floyd Bostrom."

"A cop!" exclaimed Sam Cragg.

"Not him," retorted Johnny. "A muscle man."

Sam brightened.

Floyd Bostrom smiled pleasantly. "The boss wants to have a little talk with you."

"Name of what?"

"Morgan."

Johnny nodded. "I'm not surprised. Well, you tell Mr. King Morgan that he knows where I live."

"Uh-uh," said Bostrom, "he wants you to come to his place."

"You've got it wrong, Floyd. I don't want to see Morgan. He wants to see me. Let him come here."

Floyd took a snub-nosed revolver from his pocket. "Come again."

Sam started forward belligerently. "You know what you can do with that thing."

"What?"

Johnny threw out a detaining hand. "The gun makes it no decision. Let's go, Floyd!"

Floyd came around the bed and gestured for Sam and Johnny to exit ahead of him. The room was small. There were two beds in it and the quarters were very close. Johnny turned to go through the door. Floyd, assuming that Sam would follow, started forward.

Sam turned, but in turning, threw out his right hand and chopped down with it on Floyd's gun arm. Floyd cried out in sudden pain. The gun smacked the thin rug of the floor, bounced and skidded toward the bathroom. Johnny dove for it. Sam, meantime, almost indifferently clenched his fist and brought it up. It caught Floyd under the chin, raised him into the air and deposited him neatly on his back on the nearest bed. Floyd remained on the bed for a moment, stunned. Then he groaned and began to recover. Obscenities came from his mouth.

"Tsk! tsk!" said Johnny. "When Morgan comes over, tell him to knock. Understand? Knock!"

Floyd got to his feet, holding his chin. "Give me the rod!"

"We'd only have to take it away again. I'll keep it for a souvenir."

Glaring at Sam, Floyd went out. Johnny swung the door shut after him and shot the bolt. Then he crossed to the bed on which Floyd Bostrom had recently reposed and stretched out on it.

"I think I'll take a half hour nap," he affirmed.

"I would, too," said Sam, "but my stomach's growling. That bag of peanuts I had after the third race didn't make much impression."

Johnny groaned. "I'm hungry, too, but all the money we've got in the world is a nickel."

"Couldn't we hock the guy's gun?"

"It's probably hot." Johnny suddenly sat up and examined the revolver. "A thirty-two! I wonder if Floyd was out at the race track."

"Huh?"

"Harry Potter was killed with a thirty-two. This could be the gun."

Sam winced. "How do we get into these things, Johnny? Here we are broke and hungry and mixed up in a murder."

Johnny got to his feet. "Now you've got me hungry. All right, let's try the dining room downstairs. Detterback hasn't said anything about it and they may let us sign the tab. If not—we wash dishes!"

The big fellow didn't like the sound of that, but his hunger overcame his qualms and a few minutes later he followed Johnny into the dining room, at the rear of the lobby. Detterback, fortunately, had gone into his office, so did not see them enter the dining room.

The room was lighted dimly and Johnny and Sam had seated themselves before he observed the occupants of the adjoining table. There were three: Helen Potter, a heavyset man of about forty-five and—Bill Fine!

Fine and the other man were carrying on a low, animated conversation, while Helen Potter leaned back and watched them listlessly. Johnny pushed back his chair.

"Bill!" he exclaimed with hearty enthusiasm. "I'm certainly glad to see you."

Bill swiveled in his chair, saw Johnny and winced. "Uh, hello, Johnny."

"I want to thank you for those tips you gave me today—those dogs of Charr Mechem's."

Bill Fine shrunk to about half his size. "Meet Charr Mechem, Johnny Fletcher," he said, his voice ludicrously apologetic.

Charr Mechem scowled at Johnny Fletcher. "You can't win them all."

"Well, well," said Johnny. "And well-well!"

He crossed and took a chair beside Helen Potter, facing Charr Mechem. "Miss Potter," he said, "you're in bad company."

"Nobody asked you to join us," snapped Charr Mechem.

Bill Fine whined, "Some other time, Johnny. Can't you see we're talking business?"

"Continue," said Johnny. "Get the business out of the

way, then we'll talk about . . . murder!"

Helen Potter gasped. Charr Mechem's fat face twitched. "I've had a rundown on you, Fletcher. The police aren't at all satisfied with the answers you gave them."

"Have *you* talked to the police?" Johnny retorted.

"Now, see here—" blustered Mechem.

Helen Potter exclaimed, "I've had enough of this." She pushed back her chair, but Johnny quickly laid his hand on her arm.

"I'm sorry, Miss Potter. I'm trying to help you."

"You have a strange idea of help," Helen Potter said crisply. But she did not try to rise to her feet.

"I don't know Mechem," Johnny continued, "but I know Bill Fine. And I can tell you he's strictly no-good."

"Johnny!" cried Bill Fine. "A man can only take so much."

"I said no-good," Johnny repeated firmly. "He's a sheet-writer—sells subscriptions to farm papers in summer and fall. In winter, he follows the horses. He got caught doping a horse once." He looked at Mechem. "One of your horses, Mr. Mechem? Or a horse you were trying to beat?"

"Ha-ha," laughed Mechem mirthlessly. "Bill told me you were a character but he didn't give you a good enough build-up. You're better than he said. Funnier."

"Oh, I'm very funny," conceded Johnny. "Let me tell you something real funny." He took out Floyd Bostrom's revolver, and gave those at the table a fleeting glimpse of it. "Fellow came to my room with this a little while ago. He said a man named King Morgan wanted to see me—or else."

Mechem showed sudden concern. "King Morgan?"

"Morgan, the bookie. Or, should I say, Morgan the lay-off man. He takes the play of the little bookies and lays it off in Las Vegas, in Kansas City, New York. And sometimes he fixes races . . . Did you say something, Mr. Mechem?"

"No," cried Mechem hoarsely, "but you're talking too much —and too loud."

"What's the difference? You don't work for King Morgan—or do you, Mr. Mechem?"

"No!"

Johnny turned to Helen Potter. "Do you want to go now? Do you?"

"No," said the girl decisively. "I'd like to hear some more. Mr. Mechem, you telephoned Dad several times yesterday and—and you were here at the hotel this morning before eight o'clock. What were you talking to Dad about?"

Mechem got to his feet and pushed back his chair. He snap-

ped his fingers at a waiter. "Waiter—the check!"

The waiter, who was about to take Sam Cragg's order, came over. He scribbled on a check and handed it to Charr Mechem. Mechem threw a bill on the table and gestured to Fine. "See you later, Fine."

Fine bounced to his feet but Johnny rose quickly and blocked his exit. "Sit down, Bill."

Fine outweighed Johnny by twenty pounds, but he was a physical coward. He sank back into his chair. "I'm through eatin'," he whined.

The waiter stepped up. "Will you eat here, or at your table?" he asked Johnny.

"Here," replied Johnny. He signaled to Sam Cragg, who came over.

"You touted me," growled Sam to Fine. "I was doin' fine until you touted me."

"Bill couldn't help it," said Johnny. "He's got to be talking all the time. He talks in his sleep."

"Cut it out, Johnny," Fine said plaintively.

Johnny turned to the waiter. "A thick New York steak, well done. French fries and a lot of hot rolls."

"Me, too," chimed in Sam Cragg. "Only make my steak thicker."

He settled back in his chair and grinned at Johnny, his anger forgotten.

IV

The waiter went off and Johnny turned to Bill Fine. "All right, Fine, now talk."

Bill Fine picked up a hard roll and began to tear it to pieces. "I haven't got anything to talk about."

"Then it's the first time in your life you haven't. How long have you known Charr Mechem?"

"I told you—years."

"How many boat races have you fixed between you?"

Sam said: "Hey, Johnny, pay attention. You were talkin' about horse races."

"A boat race, Sam," Johnny explained, "is a horse race."

"How do you get a boat race out of a horse race?"

"A boat race is a fixed horse race."

Light showed on the big fellow's face. "Hey, that's all right, a boat race, huh?" Then he looked skeptically at Bill Fine. "You mean Bill Fine fixes boat races? He don't look smart enough."

"I like you, too," snarled Bill Fine.

Sam Cragg grinned wickedly. "Why don't you and me go outside and talk things over, Bill? I'll only use one hand."

"You lay a finger on me and I'll conk you."

"You and who else?"

"Now, boys," chided Johnny. "Let's keep this polite. What're

you and Charr Mechem up to?"

"Nothin'," said Fine sulkily. "Charr's an old friend of mine and I happened to run into him today."

"He isn't telling the truth," Helen Potter said suddenly. "That phrase you just mentioned —'boat race.' I came into Dad's room this morning when this man Mechem was with him. Dad used that phrase 'boat race.' And I got the impression that he wouldn't be involved in—in a boat race."

Bill Fine suddenly drew a deep breath. "Charr Mechem owns horses and he runs them and you'll find him as honest as the next man. Sure, he's given me some tips on his horses, when he'd put them in a spot where he figured they could win. But he never fixed any, uh, boat races."

Johnny Fletcher snickered. "You mean he never got caught! Miss Potter, you mentioned earlier that your father had but the one horse, *Anxious Betty*. But you also said that he owned another which was claimed recently. Do you know who claimed the horse?"

"Why, I can't tell you that. You see, I know—knew—very little about Dad's activities. I've been living in the East. I went to school there and when I graduated last year I took a job. I hadn't seen Dad in almost two years until I came out to California a couple of weeks ago. And I know very little about horses, or horse races. I'm not even sure precisely what 'claimed' means."

"A claiming race," Johnny exclaimed, "is supposed to keep horse owners honest. It's to prevent them from taking a very good horse and running him poorly or pulling him and then dropping him into a cheap race. That's why most of the cheap races are claiming races. Any other owner can claim the horse."

"Is a three-thousand-dollar claiming race a cheap race?" Helen Potter asked.

"For a good track, like California Park, yes." Johnny did not fail to notice the worried expression that had come over Helen Potter's face. "Why?"

"*Anxious Betty* is entered in a three-thousand-dollar claiming race—Thursday."

Johnny exclaimed, then looked sharply at Bill Fine. "Is that the boat race, Bill?"

Bill Fine got suddenly to his feet. "You can't keep me here. You try and I'll yell for the cops."

"Who's keeping you?"

Fine showed surprise, then suddenly whirled and strode out of the dining room. Sam Cragg half rose as if to follow, but Johnny signaled him to sit down.

Helen Potter gathered up her purse and gloves. Johnny said,

"You're staying here at the hotel?"

"It's not a very prepossessing place, but I've got to stay long enough to close out Dad's affairs."

"Miss Potter," Johnny said earnestly, "I want to assure you of just one thing. I had nothing to do with—with what happened to your father. I give you my word."

The girl hesitated, then nodded. "I believe you, Mr. Fletcher."

"Johnny. Johnny to my friends."

"Johnny." She smiled wanly and walked out of the dining room.

The waiter came with a huge tray of food. Crowding his heels was Mr. Detterback, the hotel manager. "I think it is my duty, Mr. Fletcher, to remind you that meals cannot be charged to your account."

"What?" cried Johnny. "This is a fine time to tell me. You know damn well the banks aren't open evenings."

"What banks?" Mr. Detterback asked sarcastically.

"The one where I keep my money."

"You're a rich man, Mr. Fletcher," pursued the hotel manager. "At least, I imagine you must be from the way you talk. You wouldn't let your pocket money run too low, would you?" He sized up the food on the waiter's tray. "This'll cost you only about six dollars. Surely you have that much in your pocket in small change."

"I was at the track today," Johnny said testily. "I had a bad day and I'm cleaned."

"Me, too," chimed in Sam Cragg. "A lousy tout got hold of us and talked us out of the winners."

Mr. Detterback hesitated, then shook his head. "Rules are rules. If you cannot pay cash for this food . . ."

Lieutenant Blum appeared in the doorway. Johnny spied him and exclaimed in relief, "Lieutenant Blum!"

Blum came over. "I was looking for you, Fletcher."

"Tell this man," Johnny said, "tell him why we can't leave this hotel."

Lieutenant Blum took out his wallet and opening it, revealed his police badge. "He's a suspect—I mean, witness, in a murder case. He's got to stay where we can find him."

"I've already heard about it," Mr. Detterback snapped. "It's no concern of mine. If he can't pay his bill—"

"Yes?" challenged Johnny. "You'll throw me out?"

"Like I would any other person who cannot pay."

"He owes you money?" Lieutenant Blum asked.

"A week's rent."

"Not until tomorrow!" cried

Johnny. "And, Lieutenant—tell him, isn't it the duty of a hotel to permit guests to charge meals to their account?"

Lieutenant Blum made a sudden impatient gesture. "I'm not with the hotel association. I'm a police officer."

"All right," Johnny went on, "I'm a citizen—a witness in a murder case. What am I supposed to do—walk the streets and starve while *you* run around trying to pin a rap on somebody? It might take you weeks. I've got to have a place to sleep, and food to eat."

"I could book you as a suspect," Blum said darkly. "Which you are."

"No!" exclaimed Sam Cragg. "Not that."

"Then pay your bill!" snarled Blum.

"I can't. I went broke at the track today. I—I'm expecting a check in the mail."

"Not that!" Detterback cried. "You know a better one?"

"Let him stay," Lieutenant Blum said angrily to the hotel man. "Until tomorrow at least."

"And this food? Six dollars . . ."

"I'll guarantee it—the food, that is."

"Lieutenant Blum," said Johnny, "just for that I'm going to help you solve this case."

He rubbed his hands together and reaching onto the waiter's tray took down a roll. Detterback made a gesture of disgust and stalked off. The waiter began setting out the plates.

Lieutenant Blum took a seat between Johnny and Sam. "I'm not at all happy about you, Fletcher. I'm telling you frankly."

Johnny cut off a big piece of steak and put it in his mouth. Munching, he said, "I'm not happy about cops, Lieutenant. That makes us even. I've had to help out too many of you fellows, too many times. Right now, I know more than you do about this Potter killing." He held up a cautioning finger. "And I'm only an innocent bystander, mind you."

"I'm here," said Blum grimly. "I've got ears and I can hear real good. So go ahead, tell me what you know that I don't know."

"Ever hear of a boat race?"

Lieutenant Blum regarded Johnny in disgust. "So, what's a boat race?"

"A fixed horse race."

"I know what the term's supposed to mean," Blum said wearily. "But there's no such animal. Every man who's ever bought a two-dollar ticket on a horse or bet a buck with a bookie, talks about boat races. If you believe what you hear, every other race at every track in the country is a boat race. And it just isn't so. You can't fix a race. It's impos-

sible. At the big tracks, anyway."

"That's what you think, Lieutenant," Johnny retorted.

"It's not just an opinion, Fletcher. I've worked at the track. Have you ever looked 'way up high, to the top of the clubhouse? There are twelve men up there, twelve employees of the track. Each man has a telescope, a great big one, with which he can tell the time on a jockey's wrist watch at eight furlongs. The job of each man is to watch one horse and one jockey from the time of the announcement at the post until that horse and jockey have passed the finish mark. They don't look away for a second.

"They can tell if a jockey's holding a horse. They can tell if he's whipping it to make it do its best, or if he's just going through the motions of whipping, but isn't actually doing so. And don't forget, they use the saliva test at this and every important track in the country. Jockeys are weighed in before each race—and they're weighed out. And every horse, the winners as well as the losers, has its saliva tested. You can't dope a horse and get away with it."

"And yet," said Johnny, every man and his uncle knows that owners don't run horses to win every time. They put them into a race to get them into condition, to try out a field. They hold them back to build up a better price."

"That," the policeman said, "is why they have claiming races. We're both talking about the cheap horses, of course. The really good stake horses go in races where the purses are big enough so that every owner will try to win, at all times. But in the claiming races, a man can lose his horse any race."

"Yes, and if he can make a big enough killing, at the right odds, he doesn't mind losing his horse."

"There's just one little thing you've overlooked, Fletcher," Blum said. "A horse has got to run consistently. You put a horse in a California Park race that runs six furlongs in one-twelve and he suddenly wins a race in one-ten or even one-eleven, and the owner of that horse has got some tall explaining to do. The stewards won't let a man get away with that."

"Blum," said Johnny, "there's one little item you've overlooked. You're a policeman, an honest man. That's your trouble. Everybody isn't honest. And, mister, you've no idea to what lengths some dishonest people will go to make a dishonest buck. You don't know how they'll wait and scheme and connive."

"All right, I'm a policeman!" conceded Lieutenant Blum. "But my job throws me in contact with crooks every day and every night.

I know what crooks will do. Believe me, I know more about it than your honest man does. So what're you trying to tell me? Make your point!"

"We were talking about boat races," said Johnny, suddenly innocent. "A man was killed at a race track, today. Isn't it fair to assume that he was involved in a boat race? Or he wouldn't let himself be involved in one?"

"You're batty, Fletcher. The fact that Harry Potter was killed at a race track may not have anything to do with it at all. He might have had a thousand enemies on the outside. He may have been killed by a stickup man, or he may have been shot by a relative, who hopes to inherit his estate."

"What estate, if any?"

Blum winced. "He won a twenty-five-hundred-dollar purse today, but he owes a feed and stall bill of over a thousand. His estate will be less than fifteen hundred dollars."

"And a horse named *Anxious Betty?*"

"Worth, how much? Two thousand . . . three? She could break her leg and have to be sold to the glue factory."

Irritably, Lieutenant Blum pushed back his chair. Johnny said, "By the way, did you know that *Anxious Betty's* entered in a three-thousand-dollar claiming race—on Thursday?"

Blum's eyes narrowed for an instant. Then he shrugged and turned away.

V

Johnny Fletcher watched the police lieutenant as he left the dining room. "There," he said to Sam Cragg, "is a very smart cop."

"Huh?" exclaimed Sam, his mouth full of food.

"A smart cop," Johnny repeated. "Now, if you've had enough to eat—"

"I ain't had dessert yet!" Sam protested.

Johnny signaled the waiter. "My friend will have his dessert now. Your usual apple pie, Sam?"

"With ice cream!"

"I'll have the same," said Johnny.

The dessert came and with it the check. Johnny signed it, then noted the gloomy face of the waiter, who had been present during Johnny's debate with the manager.

"I haven't got any small change on me," Johnny said, "so I'll just add a dollar tip to the bill. Will that be all right?"

"I think so."

"Good. Wait—your service was excellent. I think you deserve more than a measly dollar. I'll make it two." He wrote on the check: "Tip, $2.00," and put his initials after it.

The waiter went off dubiously

and Johnny and Sam ate their dessert.

As they came out of the dining room, Johnny saw Floyd Bostrom standing just inside the revolving door. A second muscle man was with him. Floyd signaled to Johnny.

Both Johnny and Sam crossed to Bostrom and his friend.

"The boss still wants to see you," Floyd said.

"He still knows where I live."

"He says you come, or else."

Johnny looked around. "There just happens to be a cop here."

"Uh-uh," said Floyd. "Blum left ten minutes ago."

"Oh, you know him?"

"Sure. Good boy." Floyd showed the butt of a brand-new revolver. "Sid's got one, too. Shall we go?"

Johnny looked at Sam. Sam said through bared teeth: "I can take 'em both, guns or no guns."

"Come ahead, chum!" invited Sid. He, too, revealed the butt of a gun—an automatic.

"We don't want to get blood all over Mr. Detterback's threadbare carpeting," Johnny said. "I think we'd better go with them."

The four men left the hotel. A Fleetwood Cadillac stood at the curb, in a No Parking zone. A man who could have passed as a brother of either Floyd or Sid was behind the wheel.

Johnny was directed to the front, beside the driver, and Sam was ensconced in the rear seat between Sid and Floyd. The Cadillac took off, made a left turn at the next corner, and another left turn after a few blocks. It crossed Sunset Boulevard, turned right on Franklin and pulled up before a swank apartment house.

"Nice," said Johnny.

"The penthouse is even nicer," said Floyd.

They rode in the elevator to the ninth floor, which was actually the penthouse. King Morgan's apartment was furnished in Louis Quinze furniture. It was in excellent taste, and must have cost Morgan a week's profits.

King Morgan was holding court in a large, redwood-paneled den. With him were Charr Mechem and Bob Bass, the trainer of the Potter stable. A white-coated butler was mixing drinks behind a mahogany bar at one side of the room.

"So you decided to come, Fletcher," King Morgan said, by way of greeting.

"Yeah, but don't be surprised if Lieutenant Blum, of the cops, busts in any minute. He knows I'm here."

King Morgan looked inquiringly at Floyd. The latter nodded unhappily. "Blum was at the hotel, all right. He left about ten minutes before us."

"We'll talk about that tomorrow, Floyd."

Floyd's face showed that he was not too keen on that. But

King Morgan smiled at Johnny Fletcher. "You know Mr. Mechem, of the Mechem Manufacturing Company?"

"I know Charr Mechem of the Boat Race Mechems," retorted Johnny.

"I didn't know you were interested in yacht racing, Mechem?" Morgan smiled pleasantly.

"Mr. Fletcher likes to talk with his mouth," said Charr Mechem. "He's quite droll at times —when he isn't insulting."

"I liked the way he handled himself at the track this afternoon," said Morgan. "Tell me, Fletcher, what's your racket?"

"I'm a book salesman. Just the best in the business, that's all."

"Then why are you staying at the Eagle Hotel?"

"I like it. It's quaint. And the manager, Mr. Detterback, is a very good friend of mine."

"You were right, Mechem," exclaimed Morgan. He is droll." He became brusque. "You know my business, Fletcher?"

"I understand you're a big stockholder in the telephone company," said Johnny. "You must be with all the business you give them, making long distance calls to Miami, Chicago, Havana . . ."

Morgan held up a hand. "No more comedy now, please. You got your nose into something today that wasn't any of your affair. Now you're liable to get that nose caught in a vise and have it squeezed. You wouldn't like that, would you?"

"You and who else is going to squeeze his nose?" challenged Sam.

"Who's the gorilla?" snapped Morgan.

"Young Samson, the strongest man in the world," Johnny said. "Get your boys to put up their rods and I'll lay you five to three Samson'll tie them into a big pretzel."

"I said that was enough comedy. Tell him to keep his mouth shut."

"You heard the man, Sam," Johnny remonstrated, with plaintive sarcasm.

"He ain't my boss."

Morgan scowled. "Fletcher, why don't you take a little trip?"

"I went broke, betting on Mechem's horses."

Morgan made an expansive gesture. "I can make you a small loan." He reached into his breast pocket and brought out a sheaf of crisp hundred dollars bills. He skimmed off five of them with a dexterity that bespoke long practice in skimming off hundred-dollar bills.

"They're running at Arlington Park."

"Jamaica, next week."

"Jamaica. That's in New York. Here—" Morgan skimmed off two more C-notes.

"I just remembered," Johnny

said, "the cops said I wasn't to leave town."

"You're going by Super Chief or TWA?"

"I've got a car."

"By tomorrow morning you'll be in Nevada."

Johnny nodded. "I'll go, Mr. Morgan, if you'll give me a good tip on a race, say, Thursday."

"There'll be no boat race on Thursday, Fletcher, if that's what you're referring to. Will there, Mr. Mechem?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Morgan," Charr Mechem said angrily.

"You're a horseman, Mr. Mechem," Morgan said. "You know how these rumors get started. I'm sure you—"

"Yeah," interrupted Johnny. "There was a rumor today that the first race was a boat race. I had the tip myself, then I let myself get touted onto *Curly Bill*. Oh, excuse me, Mr. Mechem, *Curly Bill's* your horse."

He watched Mechem's face.

"*Curly Bill* wasn't in condition," Mechem snapped.

"Oh, you haven't had time to get him in shape, eh? Let's see, you claimed him only two-three weeks ago, didn't you?"

"Every reader of *The Racing Form* knows that."

"That's right—that's where I saw it. Mmm, you claimed him from Harry Potter, I believe."

"What are you getting at, Fletcher?" asked Morgan testily.

"Thursday's race. Harry Potter's horse is running again."

"There will be no boat race," snapped Morgan. "I can assure you of that. I don't like boat races. The Syndicate doesn't like boat races."

"Somebody must like them."

"No!" roared Morgan. "*Nobody* likes them. I heard this rumor, myself, I'll admit. That's why I asked Mr. Mechem over, to talk about it. He knows nothing about it and he assures me that there'll be no boat race. Will there, Mr. Mechem?"

"I've never fixed a race in my life," retorted Mechem. "I run horses for the fun of it. I've got a rather good business from which I make my living. Why should I jeopardize it?"

"Right!" interrupted Morgan. "We all understand each other now, don't we?" He suddenly pointed at the trainer, Bob Bass. "I haven't heard from you."

"Sure thing," Bob Bass said eagerly. "Sure thing, Mr. Mechem."

"There you are, Fletcher. Now will you take this money and go to—"

"Jamaica!" said Johnny. "But I won't take the money. I appreciate your offer of the loan, but I don't need it. I've got a check coming in the mail tomorrow and I'll be okay."

"You'll take the trip?"

"Sure, I'm just a tourist here. The East is my home. We like

it better in New York, don't we, Sam?"

"I like California," snapped Sam.

"So do I," said Johnny, "but New York is home and where home is—" He shrugged. "We can go now, Mr. Morgan?"

"Nobody's holding you."

"A good, good evening to you all, then."

He signaled to Sam and started for the door. Nobody prevented them from leaving, a little to Johnny's disappointment. Sam was annoyed, too.

"I ain't had a good workout all day," he growled as they rode down in the elevator.

"Maybe you'll get one tomorrow," Johnny said, consolingly.

VI

Johnny Fletcher drove The Heap into the used car lot and coasted to a stop before a man in a checkered sport coat and cream-colored slacks. The man was beside Johnny the moment his feet touched the gravel by the sales' recording shack.

"Yes, sir," he said, smiling with pleasure. "A beautiful day, isn't it?"

"Beautiful," said Johnny, "grand. Nice place you have here."

"The best in town. Our turnover is twice as great as that of any other used car lot in the area."

"That's what the Smiling Swede said."

A cloud flitted across the face of the used car man. "My dear sir, you didn't go into the Smiling Swede's place?"

"Yep. And I also dropped in at the Grinning Greek and the Happy Hawaiian. When a man has to part with his best friend, he naturally wants to find a good home for him."

"Of course, sir, of course. And that's why I'm glad you dropped in here."

"Are you the Sad Serbian?"

"None other. Milos Draganovich is my name. And now, sir, what kind of car did you have in mind? An almost new Buick, perhaps?"

"Oh, I don't want to buy another car. I just want to sell this one. You do buy cars, don't you? Your ad said, and I quote, 'you name the price.' "

"A figure of speech, sir, a figure of speech."

Sam Cragg, still seated in The Heap, was beaming contentedly. This was Johnny Fletcher at his best and at his best, Johnny Fletcher was very good.

The Sad Serbian was not bad either. He looked around in all directions. "A car, sir? You said you had a car you wanted to sell. Where is it?"

"Here," said Johnny, rubbing a spot on the rusted hood. "This beautiful product of Henry Ford's imperishable genius, this

dream on wheels, this gorgeous hunk of machinery, all steel and energy."

"You call this pile of junk a car!" cried the Sad Serbian, in mock agony.

"It runs," said Johnny, "and your ad said and I quote, 'if it doesn't run, push it to the Sad Serbian.' This has been my trusted friend for many long years. I wouldn't sell it now, but I just received a telegram that my poor mother, in Poughkeepsie, New York, is at death's door and as fast as this beautiful car would take me, it wouldn't be fast enough. I must fly. I must go by three-hundred-mile-an-hour transport plane and I must therefore sell this trusted old friend."

"One thing you said is right," retorted the Sad Serbian. "She's certainly old. A Nineteen thirty-three model, isn't it?"

"Thirty-nine!" Johnny snapped. "Please!"

"Well, I wouldn't really know. I've only been in business ten years and I never saw an older car in all that time. How could you wear it out so badly in only fifteen years?"

"I wish I could go on," said Johnny suddenly, "but it's post-time in thirty-five minutes and I've got a good one in the first. How much am I offered?"

"Well," said the Sad Serbian, "I wouldn't mind owning this heap of rusty tin. Just for laughs. I wouldn't even sell it. I'd keep it right here beside my office, just to give people a laugh. Nobody'd believe that it was a car and I'd have a crank made and wind it up now and then just to show people that—"

"Two hundred dollars!" interrupted Johnny. "It's a steal, but I'll take two hundred."

"Two hundred! You must be crazy."

"If I was, I'd go into the used car business. I'd call myself the Crazy Croatian."

"Say, that's very good. I like it better than Madman Muntz. Just for that I'll give you an extra fiver. Ten for the junk and five for the name."

"Let's make it short. A hundred dollars."

"Shorter. Twenty."

"We're too far apart. Seventy-five."

"Twenty-two fifty."

Johnny groaned. "Now we're down to pennies."

"I'll make it a few pennies more. Twenty-three seventy-five."

Johnny accepted twenty-seven fifty and they walked to the track, thereby saving the fifty cents parking lot fee. But the first race had already been run by the time they got into the clubhouse.

"I saved five," Johnny said cheerfully. "I had *Blue Pudding* picked and she came in sixth."

"I like *Carmelina* in the second," Sam volunteered.

"*Doughboy's* the nag."

Bill Fine came down the steps to their seats, taking the stairs two at a time. Fine was his cheerful old self.

"What've you got in the second, Johnny?"

Sam Cragg let out a roar. "If you try to tout me today I'll pick you up and throw you clear over into the grandstand."

"Violent, isn't he?" remarked Bill Fine easily.

"He means it, Bill" said Johnny. "No tips today. I can't afford them."

"Of course, if you want to do it the hard way—"

"I prefer it hard—like in the first race. I just made five bucks by not getting here in time. Now if I can win the second and third, I may break even. Beat it, Bill, or I'll let Sam get at you."

"I can take a hint, Johnny, I can take a hint. But when you hitchhike back to town, just think of me."

He beat a hasty retreat as Sam Cragg made a movement toward him.

"And now," said Johnny, brushing his hands, "take this seven bucks and buy yourself a two-dollar ticket on *Carmelina* and me a five-dollar ticket on *Doughboy*."

"Why do I only get two and you five?" Sam asked.

"Because yours is the losing horse and mine is the winning. Run along now and if I'm not here when you get back, don't worry. I want to have a word with Mr. F. Stewart Hamling, the club steward. But I'll be back in time to cash my winning ticket."

Sam went off and Johnny followed in a moment, heading toward the vast lobby behind the clubhouse tiers. He searched and found a door marked: STEWARD'S OFFICE. He went through and a uniformed guard at a desk looked at him inquiringly.

"I'd like to see Mr. Hamling," Johnny said.

"Mr. Hamling's busy."

"So am I. I've got a hot one in the second, but it's important that I see Mr. Hamling right away."

The door of the steward's office opened and Helen Potter came out.

"Miss Potter!" Johnny cried.

Helen Potter smiled. "Johnny . . . and my name's Helen. I was just talking about you to Mr. Hamling."

Hamling appeared behind Helen. "Fletcher, come in, come in."

"I'd like to talk to you too, Helen," Johnny said.

They went into Hamling's office and Johnny closed the door.

"There's a rumor going around that there's going to be a boat race tomorrow," Johnny said, by way of opening the conversation.

The club steward winced. "I can go into the grandstand and

hear a thousand different people talking about boat races. It doesn't happen that often and it isn't so easy." But Hamling's forehead was lightly creased.

Johnny said, "King Morgan thinks there's going to be a boat race."

Hamling exclaimed, "It's gamblers like King Morgan who give horse racing a bad name. If I had my way about it, he wouldn't be allowed inside the track."

"Why don't you keep him out?"

"Can't. King Morgan isn't a bookie, at least not here at the track. If we caught him taking a bet we could do something about it. But he doesn't and I can't bar him from the track. He's got to do something illegal here."

"A man named Charr Mechem is a member of the Turf Club."

Hamling's frown grew heavier. "Mr. Mechem is a repectable businessman."

"Is he a respectable horseman, though?"

Hamling's face now registered pain. "Miss Potter told me of your talk with Mechem last night."

"I also told him of what I heard Dad say to him yesterday morning," Helen Potter volunteered. "About the—the boat race."

Hamling nodded grimly. "I don't mind admitting, Fletcher—and I don't want this to get out of this room—that the directors have discussed Mr. Mechem two or three times. We haven't been too pleased about some of the races Mr. Mechem's horses have run and—well, we've decided that if he steps out of line once more he's out of the club."

"Does he know it?"

Hamling hesitated. "We didn't tell him officially, but you can't always keep those things inside the directors' room. I think Mr. Mechem knows."

"How many horses does he keep in his stables?"

"Ten or twelve. They're mostly claiming horses—cheap platers. You'd think with his money—"

"He's got money?"

"He's a businessman," Mechem said, unsmilingly.

"There are little businessmen and big businessmen."

"Mechem manufactures some kind of pump. I've seen his plant. He must employ fifty to seventy people."

"And he could be losing money. A killing on a single race could be pretty big if he spread the money around with different bookies."

"A lot of the bookie money gets to the track," said Hamling. "As you know, there are no telephones at a race track. None, I mean, outside of the steward's office and I keep this room locked when I'm not in it. Bookies can't

telephone their confederates inside of a track, but they've got runners who come in before every race. They can lay off a lot of money ten minutes before post time and that brings down the odds on a long shot."

"Still," said Johnny, "a man could put a number of small bets around with a number of bookies, then with the aid of several assistants get down some medium-size bets an hour or a half hour before post-time. Medium size, not big enough to worry a single bookie, but making a respectable total. At twenty to one, or even ten to one."

"*Anxious Betty* is running tomorrow," Helen Potter said suddenly.

"And she's the horse to beat in the third race," said Hamling. "She's just run the distance in excellent time, she's in condition and her weight is no handicap." He hesitated. "Miss Potter came in to ask me if she should withdraw the horse from the race. She—she told me about Mechem. I advised her to let *Anxious Betty* run."

"Is *Curly Bill* running in the same race?" Johnny asked.

Hamling's frown became heavier. "Yes, but *Curly Bill* just ran last to *Anxious Betty*. He's not as good a horse, by at least two lengths. Mr. Potter ran them both in the same races several times, and *Curly Bill* never did run ahead of *Anxious Betty*."

"But *Curly Bill* is in the same race with *Anxious Betty*, and *Curly Bill* is now owned by Charr Mechem."

"Damn it, Fletcher!" exclaimed Hamling. Then he caught himself. "Excuse me, Miss Potter. I wish you wouldn't keep needling me, Fletcher. You know very well I'm worried about things as they are. A boat race is the last thing I want at this track. It could cost me my job."

"Who's riding *Anxious Betty?*" Johnny asked Helen Potter.

"Pete Lasker," she told him. "I understand he rode *Betty* the last time."

"He's a good jockey," said Hamling. "He's riding at one hundred and twenty-two, only four pounds more than last time. It shouldn't slow up *Anxious Betty* more than a length. Let's see, *Anxious Betty's* time, when she won, was one point twelve and a fifth, breezing. She ought to make the same time tomorrow, driving, with the extra weight. *Curly Bill* hasn't done better than one point thirteen this year."

"But can he go better?"

"I don't know. I don't think so." Hamling looked at Helen Potter. "You wouldn't know that, Miss Potter?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't. But Bob Bass—"

"Bass is your trainer?"

"Yes. I understand he's a free-lance trainer. He trains for many small owners on a monthly fee."

"Bass," mused Johnny. "Has he ever worked for Charr Mechem?"

"No," said Hamling quickly.

A loudspeaker in the ceiling of the room suddenly came to life: "The horses are at the post!"

"I'd like to see this," Hamling said quickly. "If you'll excuse me, now."

"Sure," said Johnny. "Thank you."

"I'll go with you, Johnny," said Helen Potter. "That is, if you don't mind."

"Delighted!"

VII

Johnny and Helen Potter left the steward's office and started through the big central room of the clubhouse. A sudden roar of thirty thousand people told them that the horses were off for the second race.

Johnny was fairly running when he reached the stairs leading down into the clubhouse seats. For the moment he even forgot Helen Potter, but when he looked over his shoulder she was right behind him.

The horses went across the finish wire just as Johnny reached the aisle where Sam sat. It wasn't a photo finish, so the numbers went up quickly on the "tote" board. Johnny let out a groan. "How do I pick all the dogs?" he cried.

"Johnny!" exclaimed Sam. "Look! *Carmelina* won. Wow—thirty-eight forty to win."

"Rub it in, Sam," groused Johnny. He started to pass Sam to get to his seat, but saw that it was occupied. By Lieutenant Blum.

Blum held up a hand in greeting. "Picking any winners, Fletcher?" he asked.

"Made five bucks last race," Johnny said. "I didn't bet."

"I make fifteen-twenty dollars a day that way. Horses I don't bet on." Lieutenant Blum got up. "Have a seat, Miss Potter."

"Thank you."

The policeman came out of the box and Helen Potter took the vacated seat. Standing in the aisle, Blum said to Johnny: "I understand you saw King Morgan last night."

"I thought you'd have somebody shadowing me," Johnny said, wryly. "It was a command visit—or else."

"What'd he want?"

"He tried to lend me some money. Enough to go on a trip."

"You wouldn't have gotten past Pasadena."

"That's what I figured."

"Morgan have dealings with Potter?" Blum asked easily.

"Not that I know of. But a horse owner named Charr Mechem called on Potter yesterday morning."

"I talked to Mechem this morning," Blum said. "He claimed a horse from Potter a couple

of weeks ago and he's been trying to buy *Anxious Betty*. That's what he told me, anyway."

"Why should he buy her?" Johnny asked. "He can claim her tomorrow."

"He couldn't be sure of getting her that way. Any member of the Turf Club can put in a claim for a horse. All they've got to do is put in a claim the night before the race—along with a certified check, of course."

"Who gets the horse? How do they decide?"

Blum shrugged. "Usually they cut high card."

Bill Fine came trotting down the stairs. "Johnny, I got a hot one in the third."

"This is Lieutenant Blum of the cops," Johnny said. "Give him the tip."

"Sorry," said Fine. "I thought you were someone I knew." He turned and hurried off.

"I got a hunch," Sam Cragg suddenly said, getting up. "There's a horse named *Greek Boy* in the next race. Well, Hercules was a Greek and he was the strongest man in the world in his time. I read about it in a book once."

"How much weight did he carry?" Johnny asked sarcastically.

"I dunno. Probably about two-twenty. That's what I weigh and I'm the strongest fellow in the world."

Johnny looked at his program, then at the "tote" board. "Forget it, Sam. *Greek Boy's* listed at ninety-nine to one, which is as high as the board goes." He took a Racing Form from Sam's hand and turned it to the third race. He found the entry for *Greek Boy* and grunted. "*Greek Boy's* a four-year-old and still a maiden."

"A maiden's a girl," protested Sam. "*Greek Boy's* a he."

"He hasn't won a race, so he's still a maiden. And he's been to the post nineteen times. He came in fourth once—as a two-year-old."

"I'm going to put two bucks on him just the same."

"Throw away your money, if you've got to, but don't come crying to me afterwards. Get your two-buck ticket and while you're about it, get me a five-spot on *Askalot,* the favorite."

"I'll see you later," Lieutenant Blum said, moving off.

Johnny took Sam's vacated seat beside Helen Potter. "Your friend," she said, "is he really as strong as he says?"

"Stronger, but that's no way to pick horses. I went to the races with a cowboy once. He only bet on horses with Western names like *Overland Trail, Lone Star, Sierra Sue* and *Cheyenne Betty.*"

"How'd he do?"

Johnny grimaced. "He won six straight races and me—I picked them on form, all favorites. I didn't have a winner."

Sam was gone a long time.

Johnny was about to go look for him, when the horses went into the starting gates for the third race. Sam came along then, holding a hot dog sandwich in one hand and munching one held in his other hand.

"Did you get my ticket on *Askalot?*" Johnny demanded.

"Yeah, I got it in my pocket somewhere."

"They're off!" came the shout over the loudspeaker system.

Greek Boy, starting on the outside, got ahead of the field and cutting across, took the rail position rounding the clubhouse turn. He held it into the backstretch, where he increased his lead to two lengths. He was two lengths ahead coming into the stretch and he was still that distance in advance of the field as he breezed across the wire.

Johnny did not even notice where *Askalot* finished. He had a madman on his hands. Sam Cragg yelled and shouted and leaped up and down and pounded Johnny on the back until Johnny threw his arms about the big fellow and held on for dear life. Finally Sam again became rational. By that time the prices had gone up.

Greek Boy paid $231.40, the high for the meeting. And now Sam became hysterical all over again. He ransacked his clothes, brought out a two-dollar win ticket from his hip pocket, a second from his vest pocket, and a third from his shirt. And then—he joyfully dug a five-dollar ticket from his shoe.

"I shot the works on *Greek Boy!*" he howled. "The hunch was too good. I bought a two-dollar ticket on *Greek Boy,* then I went back and got another and another. And then I took the five you wanted me to bet on *Askalot* and bought a five-dollar win ticket on *Greek Boy.* I knew *Askalot* wouldn't win. I saved five bucks for you, Johnny—like you saved it by not betting the first race."

"Judas!" said Johnny bitterly.

For his eleven dollars on *Greek Boy,* Sam Cragg collected $1,282.70. He thrust a handful of large bills on Johnny, but the latter did not bet on another horse that afternoon. Sam, however, went on to pick two more winners, betting rather heavily on both, and he left the track with nearly two thousand dollars in his pockets.

VIII

Johnny Fletcher wore a new suit of fine blue serge with a neat pin stripe, as they walked from the clubhouse toward the paddock. Beside him strolled Sam Cragg, resplendent in a checkered suit that was loud enough to be heard at six furlongs.

Helen Potter stood outside Stall 22, stroking the nose of *Anxious Betty.* She turned as

Johnny and Sam came up. "Ten minutes more," she said.

"How does she feel?" Johnny asked. "We've got fifty bucks on her beautiful nose."

"I wish you hadn't bet on her," said Helen Potter. "You know, I'm worried."

"Everything's going to be all right, Helen," Johnny said. "There isn't a horse in the race can beat her."

"That's what everybody tells me. But that talk about a boat race has me worried."

"Charr Mechem hasn't talked to you since the other night, has he?"

"I haven't even seen him. He's put in a claim for *Anxious Betty,* however. Mr. Hamling told me this morning that there were three claims for her."

"Who's claiming *Betty* besides Mechem?"

"Someone named Kirkwood and a man named Erstvogel. I don't know either one." Helen sighed. "It's just as well. I've gotten to like *Anxious Betty,* but I don't like race tracks and I'm anxious to get back east. The three thousand dollars I'll get for Betty will be a life-saver. A girl friend has been wanting me to buy a millinery shop in partnership with her and the money will enable me to do it."

"We'll be going back to New York pretty soon ourselves," said Johnny. "We'll see you back there."

"We're going to buy a new car today," Sam said brightly. "Boy, them new Cadillacs are sure beauties. Six good winners today and that's what we'll ride back to New York in."

"You pick them, Sam," Johnny said gloomily. "I'm not even going to look at a *Racing Form.* Anybody who can pick a two hundred and thirty-one dollar and forty cent winner can pick them for me any time. Pick 'em, Sam, and bet 'em. Just save enough for a good square meal tonight. That's all I ask."

"We'll have a Cadillac tonight, Johnny. A Fleetwood Cadillac."

Bob Bass, the trainer, opened the stall door from inside the stall. "Time to go, Miss Helen," he said diffidently.

He led *Anxious Betty* out of the stall. Johnny patted her withers. "Run, *Betty,*" he said.

"Run for our Cadillac!" enthused Sam.

Johnny and Sam were in their seats when the horses came out of the chute onto the track. Bill Fine appeared down the stairs. "Who do you like in the third, Johnny?" he asked.

"*Curly Bill,*" said Johnny surlily.

"*Curly Bill's* a dog," Bill Fine said automatically. Then he caught himself. "Uh, I mean *Curly Bill's* the one to beat. Yes sir, that's the horse I was just going to give you. Put it on *Curly*

Bill, every dollar you've got and send home for more."

"We're on *Anxious Betty,*" snarled Sam Cragg.

"*Anxious Betty's* a dog," retorted Bill Fine. "There's only one horse in this race and that's *Curly Bill.* Put your money on *Curly Bill* and go home rich. Bet on the others and you'll ride the rods. Believe me, I got this right from the feed-box."

"From Charr Mechem?" Johnny asked. "Is this the boat race that he's been fixing all week?"

"Boat race?" Bill Fine winced. "I've got to see a man about a horse."

He turned and fairly ran up the stairs into the clubhouse.

"Well, we got rid of him," growled Sam Cragg. "*Curly Bill!* Why, *Curly Bill* ran dead last his last time out. He ain't got a chance."

The horses were approaching the starting gate. Suddenly Johnny reached over the shoulder of a man seated in front of him. "Mister, would you mind letting me use your glasses a minute?"

"Why, yes, I would mind," said the man. But Johnny was already taking the glasses from him.

He focused the glasses on the horses, made a slight adjustment. The horses leaped into fine prominence, seemingly only yards away, although they were on the other side of the track. He picked out *Anxious Betty, Number One.*

"She's limping!" he cried.

"Who's limping?" asked Sam Cragg.

"*Anxious Betty.* Look!" He handed the glasses to Sam.

It was too late. *Anxious Betty* had entered her starting gate. The other horses lined up quickly and the gates suddenly sprang open.

"They're off!" came the shout from twenty thousand throats.

Anxious Betty had the rail position and she got off to a good start. But she was crowded almost immediately, bumped by another horse that shook her up badly. She straightened out, but found the going heavy. A horse went past her, another swerved and caused her to shy away. By the time the jockey got her straightened out once more, *Anxious Betty* was trailing the field of seven horses.

Around the clubhouse turn, *Anxious Betty* was five lengths behind the horse directly in front of her. But in the backstretch the jockey used his whip and she responded with every bit of strength in her supple body. She caught up with the sixth horse, passed it and swerving to the outside, shot by two more horses. Rounding the turn into the stretch *Anxious Betty* was second, then neck and neck with *Curly Bill.*

The race was between the two,

Curly Bill and *Anxious Betty*. *Anxious Betty* and *Curly Bill*.

Anxious Betty was in front by a head, a neck—a half length.

She had run the greatest race of her life. *Curly Bill* was driving hard. His jockey was using the whip, beating *Curly Bill* on the right, on the left. *Anxious Betty's* jockey was flailing her with mad fury.

Anxious Betty was a length ahead.

And then it happened.

Anxious Betty faltered, seemed to hunch up and leap high into the air, and then—turned a complete head-on somersault. Another thirty feet and she would have won the race.

Now . . . she had run her last race.

Curly Bill won the race. He paid $22.40 to win, $14.40 to place, and $8.80 to show, very good place and show money. The people who had backed *Curly Bill* had bet him to win.

A voice said over the loudspeaker: "Mr. Charr Mechem, will Mr. Mechem kindly come into the steward's office? Also Mr. Kirkwood and Mr. Erstvogel, please come to the steward's office."

IX

Johnny Fletcher and Sam Cragg, accompanied by Bob Bass, the trainer, made their way through the throngs in the huge main room of the clubhouse. Near the steward's office, Johnny spied Bill Fine.

"Bill!" he called. "Bill Fine!"

Bill Fine whirled, his eyes suspicious and wary. "I told you to bet *Curly Bill.*"

"So you did, Bill, so you did. *Curly Bill* beat a good horse."

"That he did," Bob Bass said heartily. "*Anxious Betty* ran herself to death."

"We're going in to see the steward, Bill," Johnny said. "Why don't you come along?"

"Me? I've never been inside a steward's office."

"Then you'll like this little visit."

"Uh-uh, not me."

"Sam!" Johnny said quietly.

Sam Cragg made a quick forward spring, caught hold of Bill Fine and propelled him toward the steward's office. He was not very gentle.

There was quite a crowd in Hamling's office. Lieutenant Blum was there, as were Charr Mechem and King Morgan. Helen Potter sat in a chair to one side and two club members, Mr. Kirkwood and Mr. Erstvogel stood near the steward's desk. Neither had very happy expressions on their faces.

"Ah, Fletcher," said Hamling, who sat behind his desk. "We were waiting for you."

"You get around, Fletcher," commented Lieutenant Blum.

"Don't I, though? Well, Lieu-

tenant, will you carry the ball, or shall I?"

"What ball?"

"You're going to name the person who killed Harry Potter, aren't you? Isn't this what this gathering is for? Or are you going to talk about the boat race first?"

"What boat race?" snapped King Morgan.

"Oh, didn't you know, Mr. Morgan?" asked Johnny innocently. "I thought everybody knew that the third race was a boat race."

"That's a lie!" cried Charr Mechem hoarsely. "My horse won that race fairly and squarely."

"Oh, did he?" Johnny pursued. "Then why is *Anxious Betty* dead now? She was a length ahead, when she went head over heels."

"That was an accident. It happens two-three times a month. Horses are always falling."

"*Anxious Betty* ran a good race," volunteered Bob Bass. "She ran herself to death. She didn't have enough of a rest since her last race. I told Mr. Potter he ought to allow more time, but he wouldn't listen to me."

"*Curly Bill* ran two days ago," Johnny said, "and he ran today. He won, too."

"*Curly Bill's* a strong horse," Bass said. "I used to handle him, you know. Maybe he's not quite as fast as *Anxious Betty,* but he's got plenty of stamina. You shouldn't ought to run a filly more'n once a week."

"Mr. Bass," said Helen Potter firmly, "when I asked you yesterday whether I should scratch *Anxious Betty,* you advised me not to. You said she would win today."

"Well, she would've won," said Bass, "if she hadn't stumbled and fell."

"Make up your mind," said Johnny. "Should she have run or not?"

Bob Bass swallowed hard. "Mr. Potter wanted her to run. He entered her."

"That was before he knew it was going to be a boat race."

Charr Mechem yelled, "It wasn't a boat race."

Johnny turned to King Morgan. "Was it, Mr. Morgan?"

The gambler scowled. "If I could make a phone call—"

"Go ahead," said Lieutenant Blum.

"It's against the rules," protested Hamling.

"Let him make one call."

The club steward hesitated, then nodded. Morgan crossed to the desk, picked up the phone and dialed a number. He waited a moment, then said: "Morgan. How much did we pick up on *Curly Bill?*" He scowled and hung up. "It was a boat race. We laid off two thousand in the last fifteen minutes. Turned down another three thousand." His eyes went to Charr Mechem.

The horse owner's face was two shades lighter. "Believe me, Morgan, I wasn't in on it. It's true *Curly Bill* was in terrific condition. He worked out yesterday morning in one point twelve and two."

"He ran two days ago," Hamling reminded. "He didn't show a thing."

"We didn't run him then. We—" Mechem stopped, consternation on his face.

The club steward nodded. "You know what that means, Mr. Mechem. What you just said."

Mechem groaned. "Every horseman does it. None will admit it, but they all do it. I'm not the only one. You get a horse in shape and you try him out a couple of times. Then you put him in the right spot and go out to win."

"You've done that once too often, Mr. Mechem. The directors aren't going to like it at all."

"All right, I held *Curly Bill*. But today's race wasn't a boat race. I swear—"

"Don't swear," said Johnny, "because it *was* a boat race." He stepped forward, holding up a length of horsehair. "*Anxious Betty* limped just before she went into the starting gate. She tried her best to make a race of it and ran her heart out, but she couldn't make it. Not with this around her ankle."

Lieutenant Blum snatched the hair from Johnny's hand. "It's nothing but a horsehair."

"That's all," said Johnny, "but you put that around a horse's ankle—tight—the night before and the next day the horse runs with three legs. You can't see the hair unless you look for it. And I looked for it—before Bob Bass had a chance to get at what was left of *Anxious Betty* and remove the hair."

"It's a lie!" screamed Bob Bass. "I never done it."

"You're the only man who could have done it," Johnny said relentlessly. "You were her trainer. You were with the horse all the time. If somebody else had put this hair on her ankle, you'd have known it. You knew it was there when you saddled her. You had to know. And you let her go out on the track with a swollen ankle. Nobody but you could have done that."

"I didn't kill Mr. Potter!" bleated Bob Bass desperately. "I didn't want to do it. It was—"

"Hold it, everybody!" thundered Bill Fine.

Every eye in the room went to Bill Fine. He was backing away toward the door, a .32 in his hand. He moved it steadily from right to left.

"You, Bill?" said Johnny Fletcher. "You tried to fix *Anxious Betty* the other day, you and Mechem, but Potter wouldn't have any part of you."

"I knew nothing about it," Mechem said hurriedly.

"The hell you didn't!" snarled

Bill Fine. "You were in it with me."

"Not in the killing! You did that on your own."

"All right, what of it? He got wise to Bass and I had to shut him up. Then you got chicken when King Morgan talked to you. I wasn't going to let the whole thing blow up. *Curly Bill* could beat any horse in the race except *Anxious Betty* and—*back, Fletcher!*"

Johnny had taken a forward step.

"You should have stuck to touting," cried Johnny. "It's cheap, but it's safe."

"A hundred thousand," exclaimed Bill Fine. "That's what I would have made out of it. And I lose because of a couple of chicken-hearted—"

"Bass," said Johnny suddenly. "Open the door!"

Bass started to move toward the door. Fine whipped the gun in his direction, and fired. Bass cried out, clutched his left hand to his right arm and reeled back.

Fine started to whirl back, but Sam was diving at him headlong. It was a low dive. Fine saw that he had to depress his gun, jerked it down and fired into the floor, an inch beyond Sam. Then Sam hit him. He bowled over him, bounced up to his knees and hit him in the face. Bones crunched under his fist. Fine screamed, tried to jam the gun against Sam Cragg. Sam caught his arm, twisted . . . and a bone snapped. That was all.

Fine and Bass were gone. They went with Lieutenant Blum and a pair of track policemen. King Morgan started to leave.

"Stay and watch the fun," said Johnny. "Mr. Hamling, weren't there three claims for *Anxious Betty?*"

"That's right, I almost forgot."

"*Anxious Betty* is dead!" cried Charr Mechem.

"That doesn't change things," Hamling said. "When a horse is claimed, the claimant *can't* change his mind. If the horse is dead that's his hard luck."

"But who wants a dead horse?"

"Nobody," Hamling said firmly. "But I have here three checks for three thousand dollars each. Two of them will be returned. The question is which two. He looked about his desk. "I thought I had a pack of cards here. We usually cut to see who wins."

He pulled open a drawer.

"I guess I'll have to send downstairs for some cards," he said.

Johnny held up a pack of cards. "Here's a pack I just happened to have with me." He handed them to Hamling.

Hamling took the cards out of the box, riffled them quickly and put the pack on his desk. "Mr. Erstvogel, Mr. Kirkwood. Me-

chem . . ." The three men stepped forward.

"Three thousand dollars for a dead horse," said Mr. Erstvogel, shaking his head.

Kirkwood shrugged. "It's all part of the game. What'll it be—high card?"

Johnny stepped up close beside Kirkwood. "Let Mecham cut first," he said in the faintest whisper.

Mr. Kirkwood gave Johnny a sharp look, hesitated, and then nodded to Mechem. "You first," he said.

Mechem emitted an audible groan and reached for the cards. He took up about half the pack, but held the cards face down. Kirkwood cut next, exposing his bottom card.

"A trey!" he exclaimed in relief.

Mr. Erstvogel cut. "Jack of spades."

"Mr. Mechem?" said Hamling.

Slowly, Mechem turned over his bottom card. "A king!" he cried, in agony.

"You win the dead horse," said Johnny Fletcher.

Hamling picked up a check. "It's certified, Miss Potter. There won't be any trouble about cashing it."

Sam Cragg tugged at Johnny's sleeve. "Where'd you get the cards, Johnny?"

"Quiet, Sam," exclaimed Johnny, nudging the big fellow. "Helen, can we give you a lift back to town?"

"How can we give her a lift when we ain't got a car?" cried Sam.

"We'll buy one," said Johnny. "In fact, I've been thinking we'd stroll over to the Sad Serbian's and buy back The Heap. Helen, if you're not in too great a hurry to get back to New York, we might even drive you back."

Helen Potter shook her head. "No, thanks, I'll take the train. You see, I saw The Heap, as you call it, outside the hotel yesterday."

Johnny grinned and opened the door for her. They went through.

In the outer office, Helen Potter turned to Johnny. "That pack of cards, Johnny, they were Mr. Hamling's. I saw you pick them up from his desk during the commotion."

"That's right." He grinned suddenly. "Didn't you think it was only fair that Charr Mechem should win?"

"It was poetic justice."

"That's what I thought, so I used a little trick gamblers use in cutting high cards. I crimped a king and—had Mechem cut first. He picked it."

Helen Potter shook her head. "What am I going to do with you, Johnny?"

"You can buy us a dinner—but not at the Eagle Hotel!" he told her, grinning.

summer show

by . . . Julian Symons

It was a Brigg's Fair kind of summer festival — as carefree as a theme song by Delius. And then crime reared its ugly fangs.

"WHAT DO you think of that little lot?" From under the bar counter Joe Grayson drew out six shiny broad beans—green and plump, and well over a foot long. "It's too late to enter them in the show, but I reckon they'd have taken first prize," he said.

The little group of farmers clustered about the counter considered the beans solemnly. Francis Quarles looked at the poster behind Grayson's head, which announced that the Mannington Flower and Produce Summer Show was to be held on the following day. Its attractions would be many and variegated—sideshows, stalls, a "gypsy" fortune teller, outdoor bowling and prizes for local fruit, flowers and vegetables.

The men at the counter agreed that the beans looked good. Joe Grayson split one to reveal eight perfectly shaped beans, green and delicate, an equal distance apart in their soft furry beds.

"If they'd all have been like that you'd a won it," said one of the farmers. "What do you say, Mr. Ashley?"

Julian Symons is one of those very scholarly English mystery writers whose shining gifts of narrative prose display themselves in completely limpid fashion, and with a folklorish simplicity. So here we have a little slice of rustic English life, as thick with clustering legends as a hive of golden honey-bees until—a wholly amiable man is found with a knife through his neck.

A cadaverous, pale, dark-featured man with deep-set eyes, who had been sitting on a bench at the other end of the room, came up to the counter.

Quarles's host, a painter named John Tarn, whispered, "Here's the expert."

"Shouldn't look at these by rights, since I'm judging," Ashley said. "But as you're not entering them there's no harm in it." He looked at the opened bean, and nodded. Then most delicately, merely using his fingertips, he felt the others. Three he put aside with no comment, but at the fourth he said: "Soft in the middle."

He split the bean. It looked identical with the others, but inside there were only five beans instead of eight. "No good," Ashley said.

"You're a wonder, Mr. Ashley," said one of the farmers. "Have a drink."

"Tell me what that means," Quarles said to Tarn. "I'm baffled."

"They judge beans and peas like this. You make an entry of six bean or pea pods, and they should contain exactly the same number of beans or peas in them. Of course there are other factors too—tenderness, ripeness and so on—but the number is all important. The judge opens just one pod and he tries to find a faulty one, as Ashley did just then.

"They say Ashley's infallible, the best judge in this part of the country, in fact. He's a chap who has spent most of his life traveling round the world. He has done all sorts of jobs—or so he claims—from selling vacuum cleaners and building bridges to working in a circus. Then he settled down in England, made money as a nurseryman, and retired."

A big red-faced man pushed open the pub door. "Good evening, gentlemen," he said. "A pint of ale please, landlord. It looks like a fine day for the Show tomorrow."

There was a chorus of "Evening, Mr. Wayne." Ashley did not join in. He thumped his glass of beer on the table still half full, and walked out of the pub. There was an awkward silence for a moment; then everybody went on talking.

When they were on their way home Tarn enlightened Quarles as to the reason for Ashley's rudeness. "A bad business," he said. "Ashley's daughter, his only child, was more or less engaged to Wayne's son, and he threw her over, rather brutally. She took an overdose of sleeping tablets and died. Wayne's son's married and is now farming out in Kenya. But Ashley and his wife have never forgiven Wayne. He was against the marriage from the start, thought the two weren't suited.

"The Ashleys are fanatical

about it. They both got religion late in life, and belong to some obscure sect, and they regard Wayne more or less as the devil's disciple. There was trouble between them yesterday when Ashley was helping to put up the tents. Wayne's dressing up as the fortune teller and there was a scene because he thought he'd been put rather out of the way. It's bad to have that kind of thing in a village."

The next day the sun was shining when Tarn and Quarles entered the large meadow where the show was being held, half an hour before it was due to open. Colonel Comstock, who had organized it all, greeted Tarn with a worried smile.

"Ashley hasn't turned up yet to judge the beans and peas," he told them. "He telephoned and said he'd been unavoidably delayed . . . Here he is now."

Ashley, looking grim and hollow-eyed, and accompanied by a gray-haired woman, was ushered by Colonel Comstock to the door of a large tent. The two of them went in while Comstock stayed at the entrance talking to Quarles and Tarn.

"Is this your first experience of a country show, Mr. Quarles?" he asked. Quarles said it was. "Well, we're lucky to have so fine a day for it. Hope Ashley's not going to be long. All the judging should have been done this morning."

Ashley was not long. After a few minutes his head poked out from inside the tent flap. On tables inside the tent the entries of broad beans, peas and other vegetables had been arranged on plates. One pod had been opened from each entry in the bean and pea section which Ashley was judging, and he curtly indicated the entries to which he had given prizes.

Outside the tent there was a shout, and agitated voices. A young man wearing a steward's badge ran in.

"Is there a doctor here? It's the fortune teller, Mr. Wayne."

"What's the matter with him? Has he been taken ill?" asked Colonel Comstock.

The young man gulped. "No, Colonel. There's a knife—through his neck."

The small fortune-teller's tent was next to the big marquee where Ashley had been judging. Wayne lay sprawled face forward across his table, his crystal ball just in front of him. His tall hat had fallen on the ground by his side. A thin shaft of sunlight streamed down through a gap near the top of the tent and shone on the knife embedded deep in his neck.

Quarles put a hand on the body. It was still warm.

"It's a queer sort of knife," said Colonel Comstock. "I never saw one before with a handle as

light as that. And the blade doesn't even look sharp."

Quarles touched the edge of the blade. "It's completely blunt. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Yes. Undoubtedly that tremendous strength must have been needed to drive it deep into his neck like that. How long has he been dead?"

"Not more than five minutes," Quarles said.

"Then that lets Ashley out," the Colonel said. "He's the obvious suspect, but he was in the marquee judging. There's no other way out of it except the entrance where we were standing."

Quarles's face was grim as they returned to the marquee. He looked hard at the Ashleys. Mrs. Ashley, looking as agitated as her husband, returned his stare suspiciously. Quarles thoughtfully examined the open bean and pea pods and then walked around the inside of the marquee. When he had reached a point directly opposite the fortune-teller's tent he climbed on a chair and pushed at the apparently unbroken canvas. Suddenly a gap appeared, where the guy ropes had not been firmly tightened. This gap was just opposite the larger gap in the fortune-teller's tent. Through it he could see the sprawled body of Wayne.

"You helped to fix these tents, Mr. Ashley," Quarles said. "You fixed them conveniently for murder."

An angry flush crept into Ashley's gaunt cheeks. "I don't know what you mean. You saw me arrive here. Since then I've been in this tent. You can all testify that I've had no time to do anything but judge the entries—and also that I didn't leave the tent."

"That's right," said Colonel Comstock.

"Your wife could have opened these beans and peas and put the prize notices on them," Quarles said. "Because you're regarded as infallible your decisions wouldn't be questioned. You'd better open all those pods."

"Oh, I say now, I don't think we could do that." The Colonel's sense of propriety was outraged. "Ashley wouldn't make a mistake."

"But his wife might," Quarles pointed out.

In a tense silence Quarles broke open the pods of the beans given first prize. Two of the six were much inferior to the one on show.

Colonel Comstock's lips were tightly pursed. He broke open the beans awarded second prize himself and found a pod containing beans large, hard, and well past their prime. In one of the pea pods awarded a prize there were discolored, brownish peas.

"You never judged these, Ash-

ley," Colonel Comstock said harshly.

"You can think what you like." Ashley's voice was violent. "I did what I had to do."

"The Lord destroyeth evil-doers," his wife said suddenly. "We are the servants of the Lord."

"What was your job in that circus, Ashley?" Quarles asked.

"I heard a voice that said, 'kill'," Ashley answered his wife.

Tarn was looking puzzled. "Whether Ashley judged the entries or not I don't see how he could have killed Wayne. He never left the tent."

"He didn't need to leave the tent," Quarles said. "Yesterday he helped to fix this marquee and the fortune-teller's tent. You remember Wayne was annoyed about the placing of it. He arranged things so that there was a gap in each tent, to the point where Wayne was sitting. Then he threw a knife through the gaps into Wayne's neck. The two of them planned it together. I don't know whether any jury will consider them sane."

"But to throw a knife in that way would require extraordinary skill."

"It was a special kind of knife," Quarles said. "It was a knife with a sharp point, a blunt blade, and a specially light handle to ensure balance in the middle. I recognized it as soon as I saw it, and I knew how the murder had been done. It's the kind of knife that's only used in a circus by a professional knife-thrower."

The Colonel was convinced, and his admiration was rather pleasing to Quarles, if not to the murderer.

"That was clever," Tarn said.

SO WELL-REMEMBERED

We'd like to extend to you a most unusual invitation. How would you like to become an editor? You can, you know, and quite easily. Back in your subconscious is the ONE *mystery story you've always preferred above all others—the* ONE *story that has always remained timeless and unchanged in your memory. It's the story we'd like to know about so that we can share it with all the* SAINT *family. It can be many years old or a few months young. We only want to know that it's your extra-special, dear-to-the-memory favorite. So won't you please write and give us the title, author, and source of this number one yarn on your Mystery Hit Parade, so that* THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE *can continue with unabated vigor its policy of publishing the choicest, rarest and most memorable in mystery fiction with a reader's preference individuality. So, your selection, please.*

bulldog drummond at lonely inn

by . . . H. C. McNeile

It was the most terrifying of Dark Inn mysteries — until Bulldog Drummond solved it with a touch of sleuthing magic all his own.

THE MIST eddied sluggishly over the moors. A slight wind from the north held in it the presage of snow, but at the moment only a cold, clammy drizzle was falling. In the gathering darkness an occasional hilltop showed for a minute or two every now and then, only to be obliterated immediately by further waves of the drifting blanket. Soon nothing would be visible to the man who stood staring out of the window of the inn.

Behind him a lamp hanging from a blackened beam threw a feeble light into the gray world outside. It seemed to be caught, stifled and thrown back at him: now reaching as far as the road, the next instant shut off at the window itself. But with his hands thrust deep in his pockets the man stood motionless with shoulders hunched, and the collar of his thick Jaeger coat turned up. Even the sound of the door opening did not disturb him.

"No signs of 'em?" came a harsh voice.

So renowned a sleuth is Bulldog Drummond that you could probably count on a single string of adding beads the men and women who have never heard of him. A castaway in the Solomons, perhaps, or some forlorn lost trikesman of the Sahara with a Rip Van Winkle-complex. Indeed, we're convinced that his radio and TV appearances alone, if measured linearly in celluloid, would encircle the globe. And here he is in the flesh, as insouciant as ever, with his famed creator Sapper—uh, we mean H. C. McNeile—bending over his shoulder.

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"Not a trace. This mist may wreck the whole show."

The watcher swung around and contemplated the newcomer, who was putting some coal on the fire. A green baize apron tied around his waist showed that he was one of the staff: he was, in fact, so far as the male side was concerned, the entire staff—barman, porter, landlord.

As he finished his task and straightened up the eyes of the two men met. "It's unfortunate," he said. "And yet it's better than a clear night—if they come."

"They've *got* to come," muttered the newcomer, coming over to the fire. "Otherwise . . ."

He left the sentence uncompleted, and the landlord shrugged his shoulders.

"*Got to,* and this mist don't go together," he remarked. "Any car might get ditched on a night like this. And if that happens—"

He, too, left his sentence unfinished, and crossed to the bar.

"What are you drinking?" he asked.

"Give me a double whiskey, and have one yourself," the newcomer replied. "What a pestilential bit of country."

Once more he went over to the window and stood listening intently. And as the landlord came across with the drinks, he suddenly leaned forward eagerly.

"What's that?" he muttered. "Surely that was a car I heard."

The landlord joined him. They both waited motionless, straining their ears. But save for the faint moan of the wind everything was silent.

"It sounded like a door shutting. Didn't you hear it?"

"I did not," said the landlord. "But I was on the other side of the room. Anyway, why should they be getting out of the car that far down the road? If they've got as far as that, they would come on to the house. Here's your whiskey."

The man in the overcoat took the glass and tossed the contents down neat. Then once again he returned to his vigil, having put the empty glass back on the tray. And though the landlord had followed his example he did not immediately return to the bar, but stood contemplating his visitor's back with a curious brooding look in his eyes, and heedless of the fact that his reflection was plainly visible in the glass.

For perhaps three seconds the other took no notice. Then he swung round with a curse.

"What are you staring at me for?" he cried angrily.

Again for perhaps three seconds there was silence; then the landlord turned away. "Getting nervy?" he remarked as he crossed the room.

"Nervy be damned," said his visitor, following him. "It takes more than a trifle like this to make me nervy, my friend. The

only thing that is worrying me is this cursed mist."

"What's it going to mean to you if they don't come?" asked the landlord curiously.

"Ruin—complete and utter," said the other shortly. "And to you it's going to mean the loss of five hundred pounds."

"I know all about that," remarked the landlord slowly. "And I've been wondering if it's enough. Steady, Mr. Benton," he continued, as the other man's face grew purple with rage and the veins began to stand out on his forehead, "there's no use losing your temper. You're just a bird of passage. This is my home—and people in these lonely parts talk a lot."

"What will they have to talk about?" The angry color had died down. Benton spoke almost casually. "Besides, we've been into all that."

"Yes, we've been into it," agreed the landlord. "But that doesn't prevent a man from thinking. As I said, I'm wondering if five hundred is enough."

"But, look here," almost shouted Benton, "you can't back out *now*."

"I didn't say I was going to," said the landlord calmly. "But when all is said and done, the rewards are disproportionate to the risks involved. You, on your own showing, rake in a fortune."

"That's a lie," snapped Benton. "Most of its gone already."

"Have it your own way." The landlord shrugged his shoulders. "If you don't rake one in, you at any rate prevent the police knowing that you've already raked one out. In other words you save yourself a nice long stretch at His Majesty's expense, besides losing what is left of the dough.

"I, on the other hand, am left here to bear the brunt of all the inquiries that are bound to take place, and to shoulder the responsibility of what took place on my property. No"—his jaw went out stubbornly—"five hundred is not enough, Mr. Benton. It's got to be a thousand."

With a tremendous effort the other controlled himself. Just for a moment it had seemed as if he was going to strike the landlord. His powerful fists had clenched, and involuntarily he had taken a step towards him. And then he had noted that unostentatiously the landlord had picked up a full bottle of whiskey and was holding it by the neck.

"I forgot you were used to a rough house." Not very successfully Benton turned his scowl into an apology for a grin. "Look here—we two mustn't quarrel."

"I'm not quarreling," said the landlord, replacing the bottle on the shelf.

"We're both in one another's hands," said Benton. "If we quarrel now—"

"Hold on," interrupted the landlord. "I'm not in your hands—yet. And unless we come to terms maybe I never will be."

"Rot," Benton laughed contemptuously. "You take things too literally, my friend. I'm not talking about the future. I'm talking about the past. I know that you're up to your neck in debt. I know, and you know that I know, that if I brought pressure to bear on Hopkinson he'd foreclose on you right away.

"And where would you be then? Outside, on your elbow—with your creditors swarming round you like vultures around a carcass. Yes, it's your turn to look sullen now, isn't it?" His lips set in a sneer. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he lit a cigarette.

"Listen to me, Parrish," he continued quietly, "and you'll hear some sound common sense. If there's one thing on this earth that I can't stand, it's a fool, and up to date I've never put you in that category. When I said that we were both in one another's hands, I spoke no more than the literal truth. If you refuse to help me, things could end badly for me. If I refuse to help you, your goose is cooked. In fact, to put it even more bluntly, unless we stick together we may both share the same prison cell."

"That's just your opinion," cried the landlord with all the stubbornness of an ill-educated man. "The point I'm making, Mr. Benton, is this: the proportion isn't fair."

"Very well," said Benton after a pause, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll split the difference and make it seven-fifty. And not one penny further will I go."

"All right." The landlord's tone was surly, but he knew only too well that Benton's logic was unanswerable. He knew also that in dealing with men of the Benton type there comes a moment when further argument is not only useless but dangerous. "Seven-fifty it is. In one pound notes."

"Naturally, you don't imagine I'm going to give you a check, do you? And it will be up to you to get out of your difficulties in such a way that you don't rouse any suspicions. A little here and a little there spread over a long time will keep 'em quiet, and no questions will be asked. But if you go planking down large sums of money the place will begin to hum like a swarm of bees."

"You can leave that to me, mister."

"I certainly shall," said Benton shortly. "But don't forget that I'm interested from my own point of view. From talking about you it will only be a short step to talking about me. Who's that?"

From the road outside had come a sudden shout.

"Okay, Hugh, here's a pub."

"Do you know that voice?" said Benton quickly.

The landlord shook his head. "I do not," he said.

"Well, don't forget, that you've got no rooms for tonight. We don't want any strangers here."

The door was flung open, and a tall young man wearing an eyeglass entered the bar.

"Good evening," he remarked affably. "Good, that is, if you don't object to a slight exaggeration. Actually, I have seldom seen a fouler one."

He advanced to the bar, undoing his coat as he came.

"Alcohol is clearly indicated," he continued. "And then more alcohol. A sentiment in which my friend when he arrives will doubtless concur."

"And where may you have come from, sir?" asked the landlord.

"My car stalled two or three hundred down the road. At the present moment, it's more hopelessly ditched than any car I have ever seen. Nothing short of a battalion of men and a traction engine will get it out. We've been trying for ten minutes."

He turned as the door was flung open again, and Benton glanced quickly at the landlord. This was an unexpected complication, but Parrish could only shrug his shoulders as the newcomer threw his overcoat into a corner. He was a large man, and his temper was obviously not of the best.

"You mindless excrescence, Algy," he remarked tersely. "It's lucky for you that you had your driving license before they instituted a test. Where are we incidentally?" he continued, turning to the landlord.

"Lonely Inn, sir. A quaint name, but it describes it right enough."

"Lonely Inn! That's the place Peter mentioned, Algy. We've only got about ten miles to go."

"I don't know how the devil you intend to go then, unless you propose to walk. That car is a fixture for the night."

"Could we be of any assistance?" said Benton. "Perhaps the four of us could get it out."

"Not a chance," answered the big man, lowering his whiskey. "My friend Longworth has done his job far too well for that. Nothing short of a party with spades and a breakdown gang would be of the slightest use. Can you put us up for the night, landlord?"

"I'm afraid I can't, sir. I only have three rooms and they're all booked."

"That's not so good." The big man pushed over his empty glass. "The same again," he said. "Have one yourself, and you too, sir. Algy, what are we going to do about it?"

"May I ask where you're making for, sir?" asked the landlord.

"Duncanton Hall. Do you know it?"

"Very well, sir. It belongs to Sir Gerald Moresby. And as you say, sir, it's about ten miles. Would it be any good if I telephoned?"

"We might try. Get through and find out if Mr. Darrell is in. If he is, say that Captain Hugh Drummond would like to speak to him. And if he's not in, ask him to ring me up here when he returns."

"Very good, sir. I will do so at once."

He left the bar, and Drummond sauntered over to the fire.

"You are a stranger in these parts?" said Benton politely.

"Yes, I am," answered Drummond. "Is this a fair sample of the weather?"

"One gets quite a lot of mist, but not often at this time of the year." He paused, listening, as the faint thrumming of an engine came from outside and the white glare of lights shone hazily on the window. "More fortunate than you, sir," he continued. "I wonder if these are my friends."

He walked over to the door, and as he did so the landlord entered from behind the bar.

"Your call went through, sir," he said to Drummond. "The gentleman is on the phone. Will you come this way?"

Drummond followed him, and a moment or two later he heard Peter Darrell's voice at the other end of the wire.

"Listen, Peter," he said. "That raging blight, Algy, has ditched the car, and it's impossible to get her out tonight. Do you think you could come over and get us? We're at Lonely Inn."

"But, my dear old boy," came the answer, "you can't see your hand in front of your face here. I doubt if any car would ever make it tonight. Why don't you both stop there? I'll come for you tomorrow morning."

"There isn't a room vacant. They've only got three and they are full up."

"What's that? Only three rooms? Don't you believe it. To my certain knowledge that blackguard Parrish has eight."

And at the moment Drummond saw a shadow on the floor by the door leading out of the bar. The landlord was listening. From the room came the sound of voices—one of them a woman's. A faintly puzzled frown wrinkled his forehead.

"Hello! Are you there, Hugh?" Peter's voice came through again.

"Yes, I'm here, Peter. I'm just thinking as to what is the best thing to do."

Why had the landlord lied over the number of rooms? Why had he tried to turn away perfectly good trade? And why did Peter allude to Parrish as a blackguard?

"Well, old man, it's impossible to get to you tonight!" Peter's tone was definite. "If by any chance it lifts later, I'll come over. But it won't."

"I understand, Peter—perfectly." The frown had gone; a faint smile twitched round his lips. "And never forget, old boy, that out of the most unlikely oysters there sometimes emerges a pearl. Did you say anything? Merely a hiccough! Good. Well, Peter, Algy and I will expect you when we see you."

He replaced the receiver, and strolled back into the bar, to find two newcomers. One was a scholastic looking gray-haired man with a slight stoop. He wore pince-nez and at the moment was warming his hands by the fire. The other was a girl, whom Algy was contemplating with considerable favor. She was young—nineteen or twenty at the most—and a well-fitting jumper and skirt showed off her figure to perfection.

She glanced up as Drummond came in, and then continued her remarks. And it was obvious that she was not in the best of tempers. "Anyway, where is Tiny?" she demanded of Benton.

"I'm afraid he hasn't arrived yet. And though I don't want to sound pessimistic, I'm afraid, with this mist, that there's a chance he won't be able to manage it. Still there's plenty of time yet. Now, I think I'd better go and put your car away for you."

"That's very good of you, Harold," said the gray-haired man. "Mary has had all the driving she wants today."

"Why did he ever suggest we should come to this beastly place, Daddy?" she exclaimed reproachfully as Benton left the room.

"It's central, my dear. Convenient for Tiny and us and him. Don't forget he's a busy man. No one could have foreseen this mist."

"Grim, isn't it?" said Drummond. "You were luckier than us, sir. We got ditched about three hundred yards down the road."

"I saw the car as we passed," said the girl. "What bad luck."

And at the moment Benton put his head round the door. "Would it be any use to you, sir," he said to Drummond, "if before I put Mr. Patson's car away I towed you out? I have a rope."

"I wouldn't dream of troubling you," answered Drummond affably. "The car is quite all right where it is for the night. My friend is coming over from Duncanton Hall if he can. If not, we shall have to make shift in the bar here as best we can."

"You know Sir Gerald?" said the gray-haired man as Benton withdrew.

"Slightly," answered Drummond. "A great friend of mine is staying with him, and we are supposed to be putting up there

on our way down from Scotland."

"A charming man. My daughter and I have met him two or three times."

"You come from this part of the country?" asked Drummond.

"About forty miles away," said the other. "This is a rendezvous for us and my daughter's fiance with my solicitor, Mr. Benton."

For a moment or two Drummond studied him through half-closed lids. A delightful old man, he reflected; of the type who tells his life history to complete strangers. And apparently his daughter thought so too.

"Really, Daddy," she remarked, "I don't think those details can interest anybody else."

She gave Drummond an apologetic little smile, which he returned. And then his eyes fixed themselves on the landlord, who was busy doing nothing behind the bar.

"And where is this gentleman going to sleep?" he asked. "I understood you had only three rooms?"

"If he comes, sir," said the landlord obsequiously, "I shall let him have my own room, of course. You see I have other rooms, but they are not furnished."

"Oh!" grunted Drummond noncommittally, and joined Algy at his table. The girl and her father were talking by the fire, to be joined a few moments later by Benton.

"I don't think, Algy," said Drummond in a low voice, "that our host is a very clever man. Did you notice what he said. 'If he comes'? why 'If'?"

"The mist, old fruit. The mist."

"The mist didn't come down till an hour ago. Up till then therefore he must have assumed that the fiance was arriving. And yet he has taken no steps to provide a certain guest with a room."

"What are you getting at, Hugh?"

"At present—nothing. Peter alluded to him over the phone as a blackguard, and said that to his certain knowledge he had eight rooms. Which may or may not mean anything. He may have said blackguard as a term of endearment, and he probably has no idea how many rooms there are. At the same time . . ."

He lit a cigarette thoughtfully, his eyes on the group by the fire.

"I wonder if I'm fancying things, Algy," he said. "Or is the wish father to the thought? But I'm inclined to agree with the girl. In these days of easy travel why choose an awful pub like this for a business rendezvous? Well now! The girl and her father are going upstairs with the landlord. I think I'll lead Mr. Benton up the garden path a little. Come over to the fire."

"It will be fortunate for us if Miss Patson's fiance does not turn up," Algy remarked. "It will solve the problem of accommodation."

"I don't think you had better rely on it," said Benton. "He will get through if he possibly can."

"But with only three rooms it's going to be a bit awkward for him," went on Drummond.

"Three rooms! Er—three rooms! What the deuce . . . Er —Parrish!"

The landlord appeared in the bar.

"Parrish, what on earth did you mean when you said three rooms? You meant four. There's one for Mr. Montgomery."

"I was giving up my own room to him, sir," said the landlord after a pause.

"Of course, of course. I'd forgotten," exclaimed Benton. "Your own. I remember now."

"You ought to keep a reception clerk here, you know," said Drummond blandly. "Someone whose masterly brain could coordinate this seething mass of visitors, without our host being in doubt up till the last moment as to where the angels are going to watch over him."

"Fortunately for him," said Benton with a laugh. "I don't think he'll be left wondering for long tonight." He was staring at the window as he spoke. "The mist is definitely lifting, though I never thought it would. And that means that Mr. Montgomery will certainly arrive, and that you will be able to make Duncanton Hall."

He was right. Already some stars were showing and the night was almost clear.

"How very lucky for all concerned," said Drummond quietly, and as he spoke the telephone rang. "Very lucky indeed," he repeated as the landlord went to answer it. "And so I shall never know the answer."

"The answer!" Benton looked at him. "What to?"

"The great problem. Where should we have slept if the mist had continued?"

"Mr. Darrel, sir," said the landlord, coming back, "wanted to know what it was like here. I told him and he's coming over right away."

"Thank you," remarked Drummond and fell silent staring at the fire, while Algy watched him curiously. Benton had left the room and the landlord was busy behind the bar.

"What's stung you, Hugh?"

"The first time the landlord said three rooms, Benton said nothing, although on their showing four were needed. Presumably he'd ordered them. But when I said three rooms to him he got hot and bothered. Four were necessary and he didn't know the landlord was giving up his. Moreover when the landlord

said it Mr. Montgomery had not been mentioned but when I said it he had. Get me, Algy?"

"Not quite."

"There was no necessity to account for Mr. Montgomery until the girl mentioned him. And they hadn't rehearsed that bit so far as we were concerned."

"But why was there no necessity to account for Montgomery? Supposing he'd turned up?"

"Supposing my foot. Don't you see, Algy, that the only possible reason which would have kept Benton quiet when the landlord said three rooms instead of four was the knowledge that Parrish was giving up his—if the show was above board. And he didn't know it until the landlord told him a few minutes ago."

"But what does it lead to, man?"

"That Montgomery is not coming at all. That only three rooms have been booked, and when I cornered the landlord all he could say was what he did. For if he had then mentioned a fourth, that would have been available for you and me. And they don't want you and me here."

"I say, old boy, it's a bit far-fetched, isn't it?"

"Is it? You think it over. I don't like it, Algy. That man Benton may be a solicitor, but if he was mine I'd change my firm. No, I don't like it. The father strikes me as a fine old chap, but he'd be a child in the hands of those two."

"What do you propose to do about it?"

"I haven't got as far as that, yet. We'll see what Peter thinks."

But Peter Darrell, when he arrived a quarter of an hour later, was not very helpful. And even Drummond, after the suitcases had been taken out of the stranded car, had to confess to himself that it looked a bit thin. When actually repeated to someone who had not been there, the whole point of the number of rooms seemed to fall flat.

"When I called Parrish a blackguard," said Peter," it was really only a figure of speech. Admittedly the man hasn't a good reputation, but it's principally because he's in debt all over the place. And admittedly the inn hasn't a good reputation either, but that is largely due to the stories from the past, and has nothing to do with the present landlord. There were two or three mysterious murders and disappearances in days gone by.

"Come on, old boy. Let's push back before there's any chance of the mist returning. After all what can happen to the lady? You surely aren't suggesting that the solicitor has taken her there to wreak his wicked will on her?"

"I'll lay six to four he gets a cauliflower ear if he has," remarked Algy with a grin. "Tread

on it, Peter. I want a cocktail."

All perfectly logical, Drummond agreed. And yet, try as he would all through the evening he could not shake off his feeling that something was wrong. It was absurd to imagine that Benton and the landlord intended any violence to old Patson and his daughter. Retribution would be immediate, especially now that Algy and he had been to the inn. It was equally absurd to imagine that Benton was trying any funny stuff. And yet . . . back it came again and again. Why such a rendezvous? Why that discrepancy about the rooms? And at last he could stand it no longer.

"Peter," he said, "I may be several sorts of a fool. But I can't help it. I've got to be sure. Now Moresby knows the Patsons slightly. I want you to ring up Lonely Inn, ostensibly for Moresby, and ask to speak to Miss Patson or her father. Say anything you like about hearing that they are in the neighborhood, but find out if Montgomery has arrived."

"Okay, Chief," said Peter resignedly. "And if he has?"

"Make a noise like a hen and ring off. Then come back and we'll play slosh."

Peter left the hall, and Drummond glanced round the house party. It was a large one, and he was fully conscious that he was not pulling his weight. But he couldn't help it. Once the other matter was settled everything would be different. And then he saw Peter coming towards him and he knew the answer before he spoke.

"The gentleman has not arrived," said Peter briefly. "I spoke to the girl, and she said that they can't understand why he hasn't phoned if he was delayed."

"Algy!" Drummond beckoned to Longworth, who came over and joined them. "Montgomery has not arrived at Lonely Inn, and he hasn't telephoned. It is now half past ten and the night is clear. That settles it."

"Merciful heavens!" cried Algy. "Settles what?"

"Go and change," said Drummond briefly. "Coming, Peter? We'll sneak out by a side door, and get off as soon as possible. Lights out, Peter. We'll leave the car here and walk."

A quarter of a mile ahead of them a solitary light from one of the top windows of Lonely Inn was shining over the moors. The wind had dropped; the night was fresh and pitch dark. The road stretched in front of them—a smudged gray streak. From somewhere in the distance came the faint music of water over stones. Save for that everything was uncannily still.

They were all wearing rubber shoes, and had there been a spectator he might well have thought that three phantoms were abroad

that night. Not a sound heralded their passing. They loomed up and were gone. And when they were still a hundred yards from the inn, the light in the top window was extinguished. A narrow beam across the road, however, now became visible. The bar was still occupied.

The curtains were drawn, but an open chink gave them a clear view of the interior. Benton was standing with his back to the fire, and the landlord was in his usual position behind the bar. And though he was still quite sober, it was obvious that he had had enough.

"Her light's just gone out," Parrish said, and the words came clearly to the watchers through the open window. "Let's get on with it."

"Everything ready outside?" asked Benton.

The landlord nodded and bent down behind the bar. And when he straightened up he had in his arms a mongrel sheep dog.

"Don't forget to switch out the light in the passage," said Benton. "I'll go up to my room now."

"What the devil!" breathed Drummond. "Don't say we're mistaken after all."

"We," muttered Algy gloomily. "I like that."

But Drummond had faded away like a ghost, and when they found him he was in a corner of the yard at the back. On the opposite side, a candle was flickering in a stable, and as they watched it they could see a man's shadow dancing fantastically against the wall as he moved.

"The landlord," whispered Drummond. "He's taken the dog over there."

After a few moments the candle was blown out, and they heard the stable door open and shut. Then steps across the yard, and the back door closed. The landlord had retired for the night.

"Really, old man," said Peter peevishly, "I'm getting a bit fed up with this. Let's get back to bed. What's stung you now?"

From the stable came a mournful howl, but Drummond was standing motionless, peering in front of him, and his grip had tightened on their arms.

"Stay where you are," he muttered, and vanished into the darkness.

"My sainted aunt," said Algy. "Has he gone loopy? Can you see anything? And listen to that dog."

Howl after howl was coming from the stable—the piteous cry of a dog in misery. And suddenly a light went on in one of the rooms upstairs and they saw the girl outlined against it by the window. They also saw a dark figure in the yard below—a figure which vanished like a wraith into the shadows by the back door.

For a while the girl stood there. Then she withdrew into the room. But Peter was not watching her. He, too, was not staring in front of him. And at last he turned to Algy.

"Look about three yards from the back door," he whispered. "Out into the yard. Do you see what I mean? That dry square in the middle of the damp stones. I can spot it now the light is on. Is that what Hugh meant?"

But now voices were coming from the hotel, though the light upstairs had been extinguished as abruptly as it had been switched on. Then they heard the key turn in the back door, and Benton's voice.

"Be careful, Miss Patson. Straight ahead. That cursed landlord must be drunk."

And then it came—so unexpectedly that they both started forward. Shrill above the howling of the dog a woman's scream rang out—a scream that was followed two or three seconds later by a splash that seemed to echo hollowly up from the depths. For the moment the dog had ceased howling, startled into silence.

Then pandemonium broke loose. Windows were flung up, and lights were switched on. And in the middle of it all Drummond joined them. In his arms he was carrying the girl, and in the faint light they could see his set, white face and blazing eyes.

"Get the car, Peter," he said tersely. "We will wait for you in the bar."

From the yard came Benton's voice shouting, "Miss Patson! Miss Patson!"

And from above the landlord's gruff shout, "What's the matter?"

Then came her father's agonized call, "Darling—what's happened?"

They met the old man running down the stairs, and Drummond beckoned him into the bar. Then he put down the girl by the dying embers of the fire. She was now shivering uncontrollably and her great eyes never left his face.

"Your daughter is quite safe, Mr. Patson," Drummond said quietly. "And as there is not much time would you please tell me exactly what and who Mr. Benton is? And why you are all here?"

"To meet her fiance, and discuss settlements," Patson said. "He has charge of her money. He's my solicitor."

"Ah!" said Drummond softly, "I see."

"You fool!" came Benton's shout from outside. "The well is uncovered. She's fallen in."

"Precisely," said Drummond even more softly. "The well is uncovered, but she hasn't fallen in."

"I don't understand, sir," cried the old man pitifully.

"I fear you will soon, Mr. Patson," said Drummond gravely. "Only too well."

"It was the dog howling, Daddy," said the girl, her eyes still on Drummond. "Mr. Benton asked me if I could do anything. He came to my room."

"He did, did he?" Drummond's face was expressionless.

"And then this gentleman picked me up in the darkness and I screamed. What was that splash?"

"A sack of potatoes I kicked down the shaft," said Drummond. "Recovered the body, Mr. Benton?"

Standing in the doorway grimacing hideously was the solicitor. His eyes roved over the group by the fire. He seemed to have difficulty in swallowing. But at length he forced himself to speak.

"Thank heavens!" he muttered. "I was afraid that—"

"Yes," said Drummond, politely. "You were afraid that—?"

"That Miss Patson had fallen down the well." With a great effort he pulled himself together. "That fool Parrish had forgotten to put back the boards.

"Quite," drawled Drummond. "So I perceived. Oh! Peter—I want to introduce you to Miss Patson and her father. Mr. Darrell. He has a car outside, Miss Patson, and I want you and Mr. Patson to put on some clothes and then go with him to Duncanton Hall for the night. Then, Peter, would you come back for Algy and me?"

"But, really," said the old man doubtfully, "it's a little late, isn't it?"

"Go along, Daddy," cried the girl. "Go and get dressed."

She watched her father leave the room. Then she rose and came over to Drummond.

"It would be stupid to thank you," she said in a low voice. "Why are you waiting here?"

"For a little chat with Mr. Benton," answered Drummond with the faintest suspicion of a smile. "Now trot along and get your things."

"A merciful thing, sir, that you happened to be there," said Benton ten minutes later.

The car had gone, and he and the landlord were both in the bar.

"What brought you back I can't imagine," he said in a voice that despite all his efforts shook a little as he glanced at the big silent man who was staring at him unwaveringly from the fireplace. "One can only be thankful that something did."

"I can't think how I came to leave it open," muttered the landlord uneasily.

And suddenly Drummond spoke. "You are in the legal profession I believe, Mr. Benton," he remarked calmly.

"I am," said the other.

"A profession which demands proof above everything else. A pity, isn't it, that I have no proof."

"What of?" Benton was licking his lips.

"That you and your brother swine have been guilty of an attempt at the foulest and most damnedably cold-blooded murder I have ever thought of."

"How dare you," cried the solicitor starting forward. "How dare you say such a thing?"

"Whether you ever notified Mr. Montgomery at all," said Drummond impassively, "is doubtful. You planned to get that girl and her old father here alone. You wanted to kill her because, I should imagine, you couldn't face any inquiry into her money affairs. So you staged an accident, Mr. Benton. A dog which you knew would howl if left in the stable; a tender-hearted girl; a dark night; an open well. Just an accident, Mr. Benton. A terrible and regrettable accident, with no one to blame. But unfortunately for you I have a strange gift of seeing in the darkness, and I spotted the top of the well."

"It's a damned lie," said Benton thickly. "Your statements are libelous. You can't prove a word of them."

"I know I can't," said Drummond placidly. "And it's such a pity for you that I do know that."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if I was foolish enough to charge you with this accusation before the police, I am sure that my action would fail, and I should have to pay heavily in damages."

"Glad you're beginning to get some sense," snarled Benton.

"Yes. But it's a pity for you all the same. Because although I can't prove my case, I *know* it's true. So what are we going to do about it?"

"I don't know what you are, but I'm going to bed. And I suggest that you do the same."

"Oh, no, you're not, Benton," said Drummond softly. "Not yet, at any rate. You see I hate not to support a worthy profession, and since I can't bring my case against you, I'm going to give you a case to bring against me. I cannot do what I would like to do, and throw you both down the well yourselves. The Board of Health people would certainly object to the water being polluted. And so I am going to do the next best thing, and give you a magnificent example of drumhead justice. Or injustice—as you like to put it. I see your accomplice has bolted, but never mind. I'll attend to him later."

Benton screamed, staring fascinated at a face chalk-white with cold fury. "Mercy! Have mercy!"

And the next spoken word came from Algy two minutes later. "Steady, old Hugh! You'll kill him."

Like a man coming out of deep water, Drummond looked up from the job in hand and blinked. Then he flung what was left of Benton into the corner and shook himself.

"That would never do, Algy," he said dreamily. "We don't want to lose him—yet. Now for the landlord."

But that was a different story. They went through the inn with a fine-tooth comb, but of Parrish there was no sign. Somewhere on the moors that worthy was lying up—waiting till it was safe to return. And so it was only Benton that Peter Darrell inspected with a professional eye half an hour later, on a bed in one of the still vacant rooms.

"Definitely one of your better efforts, old boy," he said approvingly. "The right one will, possibly, turn a richer green than the left, but I don't think he really deserves to be symmetrical."

The pen that wrote OF HUMAN BONDAGE *pinpoints crime's darker mysteries—pattern by chill pattern—in a French Guiana prison colony*

A MAN OF CONSCIENCE

By SOMERSET MAUGHAM

In the cerulean blue depths of a Florida swimming pool murder weaves a spell most dire in a brand new tale by a top-echelon author

THE BODY IN THE ROCKPIT

By RUFUS KING

in the next SAINT

the silence is loud

by . . . Steve Frazee

Long and deep and wide was the silence—until it was shattered by the crashing of guns and a private-eye's thunderbolt gamble.

WHEN SHE sent the black Lincoln tooling north in earnest on Merritt Parkway, Scott Cummer said, "I suppose you know my license doesn't cover all the ground between New York and Canada."

"Your license as an investigator doesn't matter. You were hired to protect me—and my family." Her hair was just a shade off bronze. The up-slanting eyebrows were naturally that way, not from careful weeding. She was about thirty-five and holding together very well. Her name was Mrs. Terry B. Gall, which was not the name she had given Cummer when she came to his office.

He was used to petty tricks like that and they did not bother him unless the people who used them thought they were putting something over.

"So you've got a family now, Mrs. Gall," he said. "That's another item you didn't mention." He watched the outside mirror on his side, not sure yet but just about convinced that the little foreign job was tailing them.

She did not miss a thing. She

If you like your mysteries free-swinging and bitter-sweet, and hair just a shade off bronze fascinates you in a woman, and you've no objection to the acrid tang of gunsmoke drifting to and fro by a lakeside killer's cabin Steve Frazee should make you as happy as he has made us. But make no mistake. This isn't an action mystery yarn. It has style and finish and maturity—a brand new saga by a top-echelon craftsman who writes with disciplined vigor.

gave the Lincoln a footful of gas and Cummer felt the cushion press his back. The purr of air from the ventilator came in faster, running up her white blouse, lifting the collar points gently.

"You saw my name on the credit card back there when we got gas," she said. She was still cool. But when the foreign roadster flicked around three cars, Cummer saw her swallow and he saw the muscles tighten in her jaw.

"Ease down," Cummer said. "That thing back there is just four wheels and an engine. You strap it on when you want to fly low. You can't outrun him." She dropped her speed down to seventy. "Where we going, Mrs. Gall?"

She said, "I didn't hire you to talk to, Mr. Cummer."

When they crossed into Connecticut the blue Jaguar was a half mile behind them. Cummer didn't like it. "If this is a rough deal, Mrs. Gall, it's out of my line. I can refund your money right here and go home the easy way, with all my teeth and no more holes in me than I was born with."

She pulled into a parking area beside a cafe and stopped so quickly the front springs of the car dipped. She looked squarely at Cummer. Her throat was molded in clean, strong lines. Her eyes were stormy green. She said nothing. She merely called his hand.

The tail had been forced to run with traffic before he could pull over and stop. Now he was a hundred yards behind. One man. Glasses. A New York license. Heat swarmed into the Lincoln, reminding Cummer of his Second Avenue flat. The woman kept watching him, and then, when she couldn't help it, she looked back at the Jaguar. She was scared but her control was good. The car did not swerve.

I got a soft spot for scared women, Cummer thought. But he knew it was mainly that he was a sucker for five hundred dollars paid in advance. He said, "Drive it."

Hartford was clean and Hartford was hot. Cummer wondered if any part of the insurance premiums that were always hitting him across the wallet had gone into air-conditioning for all the girls in the offices.

"I need a filling station," he said.

Mrs. Gall didn't want to stop, but at last she eased beside a string of pumps on the outskirts of town. She watched Cummer walk past the rest rooms and across the street to a market. When he got his office, Joe Melien, his partner, wanted to talk of nothing but the heat in New York.

"Never mind," Cummer said. "I'm in Hartford with Mrs. Terry B. Gall." He described her. He gave her address in the Sutton

Place area. "Tell me about her. I'll call you later."

The Jaguar cruised along behind them past expensive new homes of ugly modernity, over the green hills. Mrs. Gall didn't want to talk about anything, so after a time Cummer relaxed and took advantage of the flow of cool air.

They were somewhere in Vermont when she skidded left into a road so narrow that the trees threw leaves in on Cummer. She made so many turns that Cummer lost his bearings. He thought she was trying to doze over trees but it always turned out that a path opened up ahead just when Cummer was bracing for the impact. Finally she came lurching back to the highway and wound the Lincoln up.

The ferry crossed from a place called Cedar Beach. They were well out on the water when the sports car bounced in at the landing. A stocky man got out and lit a cigarette, standing there with the sun shining on his glasses. From a distance he did not appear thwarted. He stretched his legs and smoked his cigarette. His whole attitude worried Cummer.

"Does he know where we're going?" he asked.

"No." She was standing on the deck. The wind was fluttering her blouse. She smoothed her skirt and kept watching the man on shore. Her waist was trim, Cummer observed. There could be much worse jobs than protecting her, even if he didn't know from nothing about the angles.

All at once she looked at him coolly and said, "Don't let your mind wander, Mr. Cummer."

"It's only natural." He grinned. "What river is this?"

"Lake Champlain."

"Where they fought the battles, huh?"

"You weren't hired for your knowledge of history." She walked around the car. Cummer leaned on the door and saw the worry screwing down in her expression as she watched the landing they had left.

When they hit the far shore Cummer was pleased to know that he was back in the state of New York but that was all he knew about it until a road sign said they were nearing Westport.

"You'd better check the gas," he said.

"Go ahead and make your call."

Cummer did just that. Joe Melien said, "Her husband was president of a home building company. It had a name, the Empire Builders. He had two broken-down carpenters and an office at the back end of a lumber yard. He parlayed those items into a half million dollar RFC loan. The business folded. Something didn't add up, but while the deal was hanging between plain thiev-

ery and gross mismanagement, Gall went to Mexico for a rest.

"As far as anyone knows he's still there. So many bigger stinks about the RFC came up about then that a piddling half million was forgotten. Nobody here has any charges against him."

"How about her?"

"She owes bills. Big ones. That's all I could run down about her. Give me time."

"Boy friends?"

"I said I needed time. You're with her. What's the matter with you finding out some answers?" Melien sighed. "You don't know how hot it is here. Just a couple of scraps more, her husband had a hell of a temper and he gambled some, I hear. I haven't been able to pin that last down tight. Where can I call you later?"

Cummer started to say that he didn't know but that had a nonprofessional implication, considering that the deal had started out so simply. "I'll call you when we get settled."

"It's that cozy, is it? And you're asking—"

Cummer hung up. He got out of the stifling booth and stood for a moment in the blast of cool air coming down the drugstore fountain. When he went across the street to the car the woman was waiting, watching the rear-vision mirror nervously.

"You've got him lost—for a while at least," Cummer said. "What's your first name?"

She gave him a quick, sharp look. "Colleen."

"Your old man is still in Mexico, huh?"

Mrs. Gall drove away. "Mr. Gall is meeting me where we're going. He has a horrible temper. There's likely to be some unpleasantness between us, and that's why you're along," Her voice was unsure. She left no doubt that she was afraid of her husband.

"Just to keep from getting smacked around a little by your old man, you give me a fast pitch, a phony name, and stun me with five hundred dollars. The next thing I know I'm halfway to the Arctic Circle and just waking up to the fact that I don't know what's going on."

"You've found out a few things by now."

They were close to Lake Placid when the light plane drifted over. It followed the highway for a few miles, then veered away to the southwest. Cummer watched Colleen Gall closely.

"Yeah. It just could be, but you said he didn't know where you were going. Was it lover boy who missed the boat? Say your husband knows about him—"

"I don't know who that man was," she said sharply. "You've made some very crude remarks today, Mr. Cummer."

"Scott. I'm a gentleman only when I know the score." Maybe it wasn't lover boy back there, or in the plane, as the case might be.

There were other things, and the greatest of them was money. Always money. But there didn't seem to be the smell of it here. If Terry B. Gall had got away with a fat bundle from a benevolent government that was willing to forget about him, he would have taken it to Mexico with him.

Cummer had himself a nap from Lake Placid to Saranac. He dozed again and then they were in Tupper Lake. He was lost for sure then. They went down a dirt road, among darkening trees, past small ponds that lay very quiet in the dusk. The trees were too close. When Colleen Gall stopped the car near black water that was slapping the shore gently, ceaselessly, Cummer peered from the window and was instantly uneasy because of a nameless feeling that something was greatly wrong.

"Get out," the woman said.

"What for?"

"I want to change my clothes."

Cummer closed the car door carefully. He did not know why he hadn't slammed it. He could see the sky, dark trees, and that was all. He could hear the water and sense its nearness, and he got the impression that there might be a bottomless ocean out there.

He shivered. Maybe it was the cold that was so oppressive. He put his hand on the butt of the gun under his left shoulder. It was warm but that was all the reassurance there was about it.

Mrs. Gall made small noises in the car. When she got out she slammed her door and the sound jabbed into Cummer's nerves. He followed her down a path toward the unknown water. She was carrying a small bag. When she stopped to get her bearings, Cummer bumped against it.

"Let me carry it," he said. She gave it to him. During the transfer he felt the warmth of her hand and the woolly touch of a heavy jacket.

The boat was an inboard. It rocked under their weight and in the darkness that gave Cummer an insecure feeling. His voice was defensive. "Where are we?"

"This pond has two or three names."

"Let's hear just one."

"Little Pond. Better sit down, Mr. Cummer."

The sudden explosion of the engine helped steady Cummer. They went out on the blackness and a cold wind flowed against him. He thought Mrs. Gall made two sweeping turns. They passed a shadowy island, all rocks and trees that seemed to be concealing something. He estimated that they traveled for a half hour at least. When she killed the engine there was just the slapping of the water against the hull and then the boat bumped gently.

"Get out and wait right there ahead," she said.

Cummer stepped into icy water that went almost to his groin. He

said an unprintable word and stumbled ashore. A rope struck him across the legs and Mrs. Gall told him to haul the boat in and moor it to a tree.

She came ashore over the bow without touching water. She gave the bag to Cummer and plunged into the trees. His lungs and knees soon told him they were climbing rapidly. He was trying to keep from sounding wind-broken when they went over a crest and started downhill.

The cabin was on the shore of another lake. "I thought he'd be here now. He was supposed . . ." Mrs. Gall reached under the edge of a high porch and got a key from somewhere. "I was sure he'd be here now." Her voice dragged uneasiness through the gloom.

They went inside. She tinkered with a gasoline light. After a time it was hissing softly and throwing a white glare that made her face look grayish. The room was fairly large, with a stone fireplace and a long window. The furniture was old but it was not cast-off junk. The place was neat and had a lived-in look.

Colleen Gall went down a hall and Cummer heard her opening doors. She returned and said, "He hasn't been here."

"The place has been cleaned up recently."

"I did that last week when I had supplies brought in." She looked at the fireplace. It was laid to go. "The first thing he always did when we used to come here was build a fire to drive the damp smell out of the place. He hates dampness."

"Is that why he went to Mexico?"

"Of course you found out as much as you could when you made those calls, but all that has nothing to do with your reason for being here. There are no charges against my husband. The difficulty between us is strictly personal."

"All right, Mrs. Gall. I'm obligated to keep him from breaking your neck. That's all. I'm no marriage relations consultant. You haven't got any clever ideas of working it so I'll cool him permanently, have you?"

She appeared startled, and then contemplative. Cummer wished he had kept still.

"I've told you the truth," she said. "I'm afraid of him. I had to meet him and thresh things out and he insisted on it being here." She turned away. "If you'll light the fire, I'll get something to eat. There's some of his clothes in the bedroom on the right, if you want to change."

"Oh sure, I'd like to get comfortable—in your husband's clothes." Cummer walked across the room and turned the woman toward him. "Look, if you're after infidelity evidence so he can get a divorce—"

"He could have had a divorce

long ago." The strain of the day lay on the woman's face, but a calculating expression broke through as she studied Cummer. Something lifted in her eyes momentarily, and then the fear and worry returned.

He watched her go down the hall. Her slacks fitted quite well. After a moment Cummer lit the fire with his cigarette lighter. The room was full of heavy smoke in no time. He opened the door. The draft drove the smoke toward the kitchen. Cummer cursed.

"Open the damper!" Mrs. Gall called.

"What the hell's a damper," Cummer muttered.

The woman came from the kitchen. She took a brass rod from a hook on the wall. Shielding the lower part of her face with a blue apron, she groped back into the rolling smoke until the rod connected with something that gave a metallic clank. The smoke began to feed up the chimney. She went back to the kitchen.

Cummer took the light and went into the bedroom on the right. He changed his pants. He knew how to do that. Terry Gall's dungarees were a fairly good fit, although a trifle short in the legs. He found a bathroom. The shower stall looked cold enough to give a man pneumonia even without the water running, so he didn't challenge it.

Colleen Gall dabbed at her food. Cummer ate with a will. Afterward she put perishables back into a gas refrigerator, leaving the dishes where they were.

"I'm tired," she said. "Goodnight." She went into the second bedroom and locked the door.

It was nine thirty when Cummer went to bed. When he woke up and looked at his watch it was almost ten. He was at once suspicious. Some noise must have jarred him awake after a half hour. He went in and looked at the fire. It was almost burned out. From the big window he could see the lake dimly.

He went out on the porch and stood listening. There was nothing but the faint sound of water to hear, but he had a feeling that something was deadly wrong.

It struck him after a while, when he couldn't go back to sleep. The silence. There were no restful, familiar noises. The few small sounds he did hear were strange, but mostly he heard nothing but utter, ringing silence.

He couldn't sleep. He spent most of the night sitting in a chair in the living-room, wrapped in a blanket. When the big window began to turn gray with light, he fell asleep. He might have slept an hour before Colleen Gall came in and woke him up when she began to build a fire.

She was wearing slacks and a sweater with green bands around it. Cummer watched her with one

eye half open. She looked as if she had spent a restful night, but when he said, "Maybe he isn't coming," she jumped and let out a long breath.

"Maybe he's still in Mexico," Cummer said.

"He was in town last week when he called me."

"You didn't see him?"

"No."

"I always have to get it the hard way," Cummer said. "So he was keeping low. Any unhappy investors or partners in this building company he robbed?"

"He was the sole owner. How many eggs do you want for breakfast?"

"Five, if your budget will stand the jolt." Stiff-necked and weary, Cummer went to the bathroom. He washed in cold water. He looked at the shower stall and shuddered.

There was no Terry B. Gall at noon. Cummer sat on the porch and discovered it could be hot in the mountains in the middle of the day. Except where trees had been cleared out on a hill that led down to a tilted pier and a sag-roofed boathouse, the cabin was hemmed tightly by timber. Ferns and dense undergrowth rose three feet high around the trunks of the trees. Talk about the walls of a flat closing in . . . And the damned unearthly silence. Cummer would not have been surprised if a Mohawk Indian had jumped out of the brush. In fact, he kept hoping for one.

Mrs. Gall came out on the porch so quickly she gave Cummer a start. All of her small movements were charged with nervousness as she looked down on the lake. "I think I'll walk around to the top of the hill to see if there's a boat coming on Little Pond."

Cummer looked unhappily at the mess of outdoors all around him. "You want me to go along?"

Her smile was a bare wink of movement before her face was worried again. "There's no need."

"Couldn't you hear a boat from here?"

She shook her head. "The ridge is too high, and the only boat he could get where we left the car is a rowboat." She walked away into what appeared to be a solid wall of underbrush.

After a while Cummer went down to the lake on a stony path. He tossed a few rocks into the water, and that was it. He wished he were back in town, chasing guys who ducked their bills, keeping a time-and-place schedule on husbands who fancied themselves as hotrods, watching the presents at a wedding. Good sound routine that made a man a living, and gave him leisure time to read about private-eyes who had experiences out of this world.

More from boredom than because of any other reason, he went

into the boathouse. The lower half was stone, set back into the hill. He stood on a narrow deck of soggy boards, looking down on a sunken rowboat. There were some rusty tin cans, scraps of rope, and an anchor that looked like it might have come off the *Maine*.

Light was breaking down through cracks in the roof. The place was cold and damp. He turned to go and then he wheeled around for a double-take. Even then he wasn't sure about his vision. He knelt on the deck and reached down. His fingers closed on a half-clenched hand, so cold and stiff it held him for an instant like a shock of electricity.

Cummer uttered some more unprintable words, and let go. It ran through his mind to grab a phone and call the cops; and then he remembered where he was. He strode out of the boathouse and looked around. There was nothing but the wilderness to see. No cops, no phones, just a hellish quiet. He looked at the cold water dripping from his arms.

When he went inside again, he went quickly, not pausing to argue with himself. The body made bumping noises on the underside of the deck when he hauled it out. A man in a brown jacket. A cold gray forehead. The rest of the face wasn't much. Cummer guessed he had been shot through the back of the head about four times, judging from the damage in front.

The body started to sink when Cummer turned it over. He held to the belt and worked to get at the man's wallet in a hip pocket. The cloth was wet and tight. It clamped the wallet so firmly that at last Cummer ripped the pocket loose. The cards inside the wallet came apart like layers of mush. Terry B. Gall, they said.

Cummer shoved the body back under the deck and it was then he discovered the deck was built almost on top of a sloping ledge of stone. During the struggle he discovered, also, that the man was wearing a gun in an armpit holster. The weapon came loose and dropped into the sunken boat. Cummer put Gall back where he had found him and then he fished out the gun.

Colleen Gall? She had been jumpy. She had admitted being here a few days before. Say she had bumped her husband and then started the rigmarole of needing protecting against him, coming up here with a bodyguard—a witness—acting worried because Gall didn't show up. Putting on a perfect act.

Cummer was grateful for the heat outside. This was a job for the cops. He scowled at the lake. He didn't even know what county he was in or how to get out of here. The silence mocked him. Now he could remember individual noises of the city, the noises

that blended into one great lulling sound.

He went back to the cabin and changed his soaked shirt for a woolen one he found in his room. All the while he kept remembering where the owner was, like cold meat on a shelf. The wallet was a clammy lump in his pocket, so he tossed it on the bed. He unloaded Gall's gun and blew away the water. There was nothing wrong with the weapon that a little oil and a rag wouldn't cure. He reloaded the gun and went into the living room.

Mrs. Gall had laid the fire again. That was a nice little touch, like setting out a guy's slippers when she knew damned well he'd never wear them again. She could say, "Why I even had the fireplace he so dearly loved all ready for him to light it." So the guy had hated dampness, and now he had plenty of it.

Cummer was sitting on the sofa, going through Gall's wallet again, when he heard the woman returning; and then a man said, "It's good to see the place again, kid."

Cummer shoved the gun and wallet back of the cushions. He went to the door, touching the butt of his own gun, now in his hip pocket.

The man was heavily built. He wore a green, long-billed nylon cap that went oddly with his suit. His hair was graying at the temples. His eyes were dark and quick-moving, but his smile was wide and pleasant.

"So this is the watchdog you hired, Colleen," he said. "I must say he looks competent."

Mrs. Gall's face was strained. "My husband, Mr. Cummer." Her voice was brittle.

"Terry B. Gall?" Cummer stared. With effort he kept from glancing at the boathouse.

"Why, yes." The man made a laugh of it. He put his arm around Colleen Gall. "You mean you've collected other husbands while I was in Mexico?"

Mrs. Gall kept staring at Cummer. His mind worked without effort. *What the hell?* it asked him, and then it asked the same question a second time. Two things he knew without conscious effort: the man was carrying a gun, and Mrs. Gall was deathly afraid of him.

The couple came up the steps together, with the man holding Mrs. Gall's hand. He paused to look down on the lake, smiling. "The peace of it," he murmured.

Cummer saw the bruises on Mrs. Gall's wrist and the terror on her face that was almost shock. This guy must be her husband after all. It would take some figuring. While the three were motionless on the porch for a few moments, the silence knifed at Cummer again, telling him how far from his home grounds he was.

What started suddenly in the

man's expression was familiar enough, for violence of any kind signals itself. Cummer might have beat the stocky man to it but he did not care to try just then. The fellow slipped an automatic from his pocket.

"I'd feel better, Mr. Cummer, if you'd let me have your gun. My wife may have given you some wrong impressions of me, and you might be over-anxious to earn your money. You understand, I'm sure?" His smile was frank and pleasant. "Please turn around."

Cummer turned slowly. He heard Mrs. Gall start a sudden movement and then she gasped with pain. An instant later Cummer felt the weight of his gun leave his pocket.

"Let's go inside," the man said. "There should be no hard feelings about this, after I've explained everything to Mr. Cummer. Don't you think so, Colleen?"

The woman did not answer.

Cummer sat down on the sofa. The man motioned for Colleen Gall to sit there also, while he stayed in the middle of the room. He gave Cummer a thoughtful look.

"Colleen is thinking of leaving me, Mr. Cummer. She's probably justified, and I see no way to prevent her going. For personal reasons she was afraid of this meeting, but since she met me on the ridge we've worked out most of the details. The few that remain can be settled between us agreeably." The man fingered a button on his coat. "You'll admit it's rather cumbersome to have an outsider here."

Cummer looked sidewise at Mrs. Gall. Some of her shock seemed to be wearing off. Her husband, or whoever he was, lit a cigarette. The way he handled it, his poise as he stood there, made a sudden, stabbing similarity to the man who had missed the ferry at Cedar Beach. Cummer saw, too, the faint red mark of glasses on the bridge of the fellow's nose.

"I think I understand my wife's fear at the time she hired you," the man said. "I suggest now that you return to New York. I'll pay your expenses and a bonus that—"

"He's not my husband," Mrs. Gall said. And then, as if the declaration had freed her mind, she yelled, "He's not my husband!"

"Who is he then?" Cummer asked.

"I don't know," Mrs. Gall said. "He met me on the trail to Little Pond. I tried to run and he caught me. He twisted my arms. He—"

"Colleen." The man shook his head gently. He smiled and his expression was one of infinite patience. "Colleen, don't start that again, please."

"He's the one who followed us

from town in the Jaguar! He threatened to kill me when he caught me on the trail! He made me promise to introduce him as—"

"Jaguar." The fellow looked at Cummer and grinned ruefully. "Now I've got a Jaguar. Colleen, for God's sake, if it'll make you stop that lying, keep Cummer here until you get hold of yourself." He flipped his cigarette into the fireplace.

Mrs. Gall stared at the stocky man with her mouth open. There was a quick rise of cunning in her eyes.

This was a screwy deal, Cummer thought. He was not sure of anything now, except that there was a dead man in the boathouse, and he might or might not be Terry B. Gall. Two to one now that Mrs. Gall had bumped him, whoever he was.

The woman took a cigarette from an end table. There were matches there too but she rose and walked to the fireplace and took a box of matches from the mantel. Her fingers shook as she tried to light her cigarette. She tossed the match away. The cigarette had not caught. She struck another match and threw it into the fireplace after she touched it to her smoke. It lit on the crumpled edge of newspaper sticking out from under the kindling below the logs on the andirons. She came back across the room and sat down beside Cummer.

"How about it, Colleen? Do you want Cummer to stay a while until you get over your fit?"

Mrs. Gall did not answer.

Cummer caught on only when the first small whiff of smoke curled out from the fireplace. He shifted his position slightly, letting his hand slide back to where the dead man's gun was jammed behind the cushion. The man looked at the smoke, mildly annoyed. It came more thickly into the room.

"I forgot the damper," Mrs. Gall said. "Open it, please."

The man knew more than Cummer had about fireplaces, but he did not know enough about this one. He looked at the rock face, and when he saw no damper control there, he glanced at the side. The brass rod that Mrs. Gall had used was in plain sight on the wall.

"You believe me now?" the woman asked, looking at Cummer. She crossed the room and opened the damper.

The man read Cummer's face. He sighed. "Well, Cummer, you had a chance to walk out. I almost sold you the idea, didn't I?"

"Almost," Cummer said.

"Sit down, Mrs. Gall. The man had his hand in his pocket. He appeared to be mildly pained. "It was a good gamble." All at once his expression changed, and Cummer saw death.

"What's the score?" Cummer asked.

"He thinks I have money hidden here!" Mrs. Gall cried. "I told him there wasn't any!"

"Your husband wouldn't have sneaked back from Mexico if *he* had the money, Mrs. Gall. So he makes a run for here soon after he hits town. I knew about this place." The man's voice was quickening. There was a cold, indrawn look in his eyes as he studied Cummer.

"Terry owed me most of that hundred thousand for gambling. That's why he went to Mexico. When I walked up on him here the other day, he was digging like a dog under the porch. He was cursing you, Mrs. Gall. He told me all I needed to know without ever seeing me."

"Where is he?" the woman asked. Her voice shaded away into terror.

"Under the deck of the boathouse," Cummer said. He saw Mrs. Gall's face turn gray and he saw her lips jerk stiff and thin.

"It was the best I could do." The man's voice was toneless. "I had to get back to town to watch you, Mrs. Gall. It surprised me when I decided you were heading for this place the long way. The money *is* here, isn't it? He gave it to you. That much I know."

"No!" Mrs. Gall cried. "It's not here!"

The stocky man drew a gun from under his coat. "Let's go down to the lake, please, both of you. After that I think you'll see the wisdom of telling me the truth, Mrs. Gall, even if you did lie to Terry. By the way, is Cummer the boy friend, or did I really twist a little of the truth out of you up there on the hill?"

The long silence hammered at Cummer.

"Get up," the man said.

Cummer reached across with his left hand and took Mrs. Gall by the elbow. It was an awkward position but he urged her to her feet and guided her toward the door. She passed in front of him and he had that instant to haul the gun from behind the cushion.

He shot at the man's chest. His second shot gouged into the stones of the fireplace as the man was staggering back. Cummer almost pulled the trigger again, and then he saw the gun on the floor. He leaped across the room then, but he could have stayed where he was for another minute.

The fellow was leaning against the fireplace, pinned there by the shock of the big bullet that had shattered his right arm just below the shoulder. There was no resistance in him when Cummer retrieved his own gun. The wounded man started to walk toward the sofa. He fell over a coffee table and pitched to the floor, out cold.

They patched him up with strips from a sheet. He regained consciousness and stared at them like a trapped animal.

"I'll go for help," Mrs. Gall said.

Cummer shook his head. "We'll all walk away from here together. He can make it. We're going to Tupper Lake, and there I drop this whole mess. Where's the money?"

"There isn't any. I gambled it away." Mrs. Gall shook her head. "There isn't any. That's why I was afraid to meet my husband."

Cummer thought he believed her but he wasn't sure, and he didn't care. All he wanted to do was go home to Second Avenue and appreciate the noises. He hauled the wounded man to his feet and said, "Let's get to hell out of here."

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the case of the button

by . . . T. S. Stribling

It was hard to believe that a tranquil Florida bay and General Custer in remembered glory could cry murder. But Poggioli was sure—

AT THE prolonged ringing of our doorbell, Poggioli stirred his coffee a little more violently than usual, glanced across the breakfast table, and said, "That is surely Gebhardt."

I didn't doubt him for a moment. Gebhardt would have had no scruples at all about getting us up even at two in the morning.

"What's his problem?" I asked.

"Murder," said Poggioli.

The bell continued ringing, but Poggioli did not stir. Finally I said impatiently: "Aren't you going to let him in?"

Poggioli grimaced. "No, why should I? If I let him ring himself out he may go away."

I was profoundly shocked. "Poggioli, such an unethical attempt at evasion should not even occur to a reputable criminologist. It is simply incredible on the face of it. In five minutes you'll be going through the paper looking for an interesting crime to investigate. You always do, except on Sundays."

When a Pulitzer prize-winning novelist looks back across shining pathways to his youth what fabulous, beckoning, indefatigable creation of his younger years would be most likely to rejoice with him in his hard-won victories? Well, it would be a highly individualistic matter, of course. But in T. S. Stribling's early writing career one character seems eminently qualified to do just that, and here he is in a brand new *Stribling mystery yarn—the famed, the one and only Dr. Poggioli, as incorrigibly magnificent as ever.*

"That's the very point," said Poggioli. "The particular crime that Gebhardt's so agitated about isn't interesting."

I considered this surprisingly new and unexpected facet of my old friend while the bell kept ringing impatiently.

"Exactly what kind of a murder would you classify as dull?" I asked with thinly-veiled irony.

"Political."

The cocksureness of his answer startled me. Worse, its far-reaching implications frightened me. If Poggioli was becoming too indolent or temperamental to investigate his murders I'd be out of a job. I wouldn't have anything to write about. With perhaps unjustified alarm I thought to myself: "I ought to make a start in this business on my own."

I very nearly did so, by getting up and going to the door to admit our agitated caller. Then I remembered that in all our years of living together in Acacia Street, no visitor had ever elected to discuss his problems with me. But that did not prevent me from becoming irritated at Poggioli's assumption of omniscience.

"Poggioli," I protested, "why do you sit there like an unwrapped mummy insisting that Gebhardt has nothing interesting to discuss. You admit yourself that he has latched on to a murder. Why should it be political and why dull?"

"Simple enough," answered my friend casually. "The tourist season is over. All the yeggs, gangsters, confidence men, all the impressively individualistic artists in crime have gone north for the summer. All we have left in Tiamara now are the local politicians."

That was perfectly true. Poggioli can be beguilingly persuasive when he dons an armor of verbal logic. But now I was convinced that his logic was wholly gratuitous and completely off beat as to facts. I decided I would test him.

"Listen, Poggioli. I'm going to the door and if our visitor doesn't happen to be Gebhardt, I intend to admit him anyway."

"That's agreeable to me," he said.

"Furthermore, if it *is* Gebhardt, and he's not on a political murder, I'm still going to let him in."

Poggioli made a patronizing gesture. "It takes a primitive mind a long time to develop faith in logic."

I paid no attention to his ridiculous thrust. I went to the door and opened it, rather fearing it would be Gebhardt. It was.

"Gebhardt," I said in a flat voice, "have you come here about a murder?"

He stared at me and nodded, obviously taken by surprise.

"A political murder."

"Well, yes . . . a politician has

been murdered. I presume it's a political murder."

I stepped outside and closed the door after me. "You can't get in," I said. "I'm sorry, but that's the way it is."

The young *Times* reporter was shocked and angered as he had every right to be. "What do you mean, 'Can't get in'?" he demanded. "Have you and Dr. Poggioli been discussing me as if I were a panhandler or a bill collector or something?"

I was in a jam. I liked Gebhardt in a way—although he wrote on an ephemeral journalistic level and in a slapdash fashion which I intensely abhorred.

"It's like this, Gebhardt," I tried to explain. "Poggioli knew you had come on a political murder and he just told me he wouldn't see you. He claims that political murders are too trite and dull and machine-made to entertain him."

"What does he mean—machine-made?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Political machine, maybe. It's unfair to ask me."

"Well of all the conceited, complacent, asinine—"

"Not so loud Gebhardt. He's right in there."

"Let him be in there! Let him stay in there on his fat— Look, I came here with the most mysterious, baffling, stupendous, brain-mangling mystery—" I shuddered at Gebhardt's choice of adjectives.

"Gebhardt," I said, to placate him. "I'll go with you."

"What for?" he demanded.

"I'll help you investigate."

He did not seem impressed—or even pleased. "Whose notes will you take?" he asked. "I write up my own."

"I'll do some theorizing," I said with some dignity. "I have been following Poggioli's methods for a quarter of a century. No one is better qualified to apply his criminological principles in a case of this sort. I have often wished for a chance to go on my own, and not have him throwing me off the scent with his overelaborate theories."

He looked at me and said nothing.

"Where is this murder?" I asked.

"Nineteen Bayfront Drive."

"Are you going there now?"

"Certainly," Gebhardt replied. "I should have been there an hour ago. But I naturally assumed that Poggioli would join me, and that having him along would more than compensate for the delay. How was I to know he'd go prima donna-ish on me?"

"Who was murdered?" I asked.

"Mark Fanoway. He's a city councilman and boss of Ward Ten. You probably know him. He's the most reactionary old coot that ever slowed up the

progress of a metropolitan city. The man who did it was a public-spirited citizen, if you ask me."

"I never heard of him," I said. "Fanoway, I mean."

"Why, his pictures came out as big as the side of a house every election year."

"I might know his face," I said. "But I don't remember his name."

"How do you vote for the candidates if you don't remember their names?"

"Like everybody else," I told him. "I give my ballot to the first name on the list. I figure if a candidate has pull enough to get first billing he must be a good politician."

"Then you've voted for Mark Fanoway without knowing it ever since you came to Tiamara," said Gebhardt, who seemed, for some reason, to be disgusted with me.

I got into Gebhardt's rattling old Press Chevy and we dashed to 19 Bayfront Drive at a speed which was certainly illegal and probably ill-advised. The building proved to be a relic of Tiamara's lush but artistically misguided past, its shrubbery and flowering plants mercifully concealing the twice-lifesize statues on the front lawn.

At its rococo entrance a policeman stopped us and demanded that Gebhardt show his press pass. Even then he remained surly and insisted that we wait while he went inside to confer with his superiors on the telephone.

"That's odd," I said. "Deliberately keeping a reporter from a crime."

"A political crime," Gebhardt emphasized.

"I suppose that would make a difference," I said.

"Your friend Dr. Poggioli would certainly think so."

"Look here, Gebhardt," I said. "You'd better make a note of that. It's unusual for an officer to hold up a reporter. Poggioli in his practice always has me make notes of every variation from normalcy, no matter how trivial. Then he puts them all together, and—feels he's making progress."

"Is there anything else around here that you'd advise me to note?" asked Gebhardt.

I looked around the big marmoreal entrance. "Well, let me see. Did you notice those mailboxes over there? They are extremely individual; I mean for the tenants. They might give us some clue as to the personality of their occupants. It's little details like that, Gebhardt, which ordinary men would completely overlook which gives Poggioli his wonderful—"

"You understand Poggioli's methods and I don't," Gebhardt interrupted. "Why don't you go over and look at the mailboxes

yourself and report back anything you discover."

"Mmm, all right, I'll do what I can to help you, Gebhardt," I said—and went across to look at the mailboxes.

After studying them carefully and memorizing every detail so that I would be able to recall it instantly to mind, as Poggioli always did, I returned to Gebhardt.

"What did you find out?" asked Gebhardt.

"They have the names of the tenants on them," I said. "One of them is marked 'Fanoway,' and that, of course, belonged to the murdered man. The Fanoway box has a button sticking in its grille."

"Button, button, who's got the button," intoned Gebhardt.

"Look, here, Gebhardt," I said, "don't be frivolous. You've got to take the smallest detail with the utmost seriousness and try to connect it with any other relevant detail you may find. That's what Poggioli always does."

Gebhardt was sufficiently impressed to walk across to the mailboxes with me. He looked at the button.

"Somebody probably snapped it off as he was leaving the hotel and stuck it in the Fanoway box for safe keeping," he said.

"An odd place to stick it—in the grille." I pointed out.

"It wouldn't quite go through. Don't you see? The fellow was obviously in a hurry and didn't want to unlock the box, so he just stuck it in the grille."

"Yes, but it's wedged in from the inside," I said. The box was apparently open. In fact I think it is still open. Why push a button into the grille from the inside?"

"Perhaps he was afraid he wouldn't see it when he came home, or would forget about it if he just laid it in the box."

"Yes, I know. But it's Mr. Fanoway's box, and he's been murdered."

"That wouldn't prevent him from trying to save a button he had lost off his coat," said Gebhardt. "I suppose if he had known about his murder he wouldn't have bothered about the button. But, happily or otherwise, he didn't know. In fact, the button itself shows that Fanoway's murder was a complete surprise to him. Wouldn't Poggioli agree to that?"

Gebhardt's satiric mockery infuriated me. But before I could think of a suitable reply the policeman who had gone into the lobby emerged and approached us.

"Who is the gentleman with you, Mr. Gebhardt," he asked. "Does his name happen to be Doctor Henry Poggioli?"

Gebhardt stared at him in astonishment. "Wouldn't Dr. Poggioli be admitted to the mur-

dered man's apartment?" he asked sharply.

"Mr. Gebhardt, my orders are to keep a record of visitors to Mr. Fanoway's apartment. If this gentleman is Dr. Poggioli—"

"This is not Poggioli," Gebhardt assured him.

"Very well, you may go inside. Ninth door to the right."

Gebhardt looked at me triumphantly. "We caught him in his own trap," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"He said he was keeping a list of the people who passed inside but he didn't demand your name. All he actually wanted to do was to follow orders and *keep Poggioli out.*"

My respect for him went up a peg. His assumption was undoubtedly true, but it would never have occurred to me. Whatever his shortcomings, he had more analytical power than I had thought.

"Then it is just as well Poggioli didn't try to come with us," I said.

"Just the opposite!" exclaimed Gebhardt. "An attempt by the police to keep Dr. Poggioli away from a murder would make a bigger scandal than the murder itself! Good Lord, what a story I've missed by his not coming with us!"

"At least it proves pretty conclusively that the murder was political," I pointed out. "Just as Poggioli said."

"Who ever doubted that?" retorted Gebhardt, seemingly quite depressed because Poggioli had not come along to be insulted.

The hallway beyond the lobby narrowed in economical fashion and presented a darkened passage through which we more or less had to grope our way. We had advanced perhaps forty feet when we almost stepped on a body lying on the runner with one arm rigidly outstretched in the shadows. I halted abruptly, a coldness encircling my scalp.

"They haven't moved him," I gasped.

"No," Gebhardt said, apparently unperturbed, "they're waiting for the homicide squad to come and make photographs." We stepped over the dead man, opened the apartment door gently and went inside.

The room had one occupant—an old woman who sat huddled in a chair looking out of a great picture window. From the misery in her eyes I knew she did not see the blue sweep of the bay, with its crowded shipping, and the towers of Tiamara beyond.

When we had advanced almost to the window and were hesitating as to how best to question her, she spoke without looking at us.

"Well . . . they killed him at last."

"Who killed him?" asked Gebhardt, instantly alert.

"Whichever one shot him," said the old woman. "I was his housekeeper."

"Who was likely to shoot him?" pressed Gebhardt.

"Any of 'em. He didn't have no friends. He was the soul of honor."

I did not find the statement difficult to believe. A man who was the soul of honor would not be likely to have too many friends in Tiamara. I saw that she was weeping and tried to comfort her.

"You have a beautiful view here," I said.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Fanoway tried to—to keep it like that."

Gebhardt leaned toward her, his eyes searching her face. "You say Mr. Fanoway kept the bay beautiful? How could a man keep our bay beautiful?"

"He—he stood up for it, sir."

"Stood up for it?"

"Yes, sir, he loved all sorts of beauty, sir. That painting there, on the wall, 'General Custer's Last Stand at the Battle of the Little Bighorn'—he rescued that out of a junk shop."

We tried to draw more important facts out of her but apparently she knew none. According to her story, she had come there that morning, and found the politician dead at his own door. She had instantly raised the alarm and had been detained pending the arrival of the homicide squad. It struck me that probably her presence in the apartment was the chief reason why the guard had been instructed to check visitors at the door. The prosecution would not want the main witness tampered with.

Solely to forestall the possible ire of his city editor Gebhardt measured the distance of the dead man from his door, from the picture window, and from the opposite side of the hallway. In short, all that battery of figures which newspaper writers fill in so voluminously when they have nothing else to print about a murder.

When we had finished this wholly unnecessary undertaking, I said, "Let's examine that mailbox again as we go out. It's the only thing here with a touch of mystery about it."

"Listen," said Gebhardt impatiently, "you fiction writers are always over-sold on mystery. What I want are the *facts.*"

"Well, the button is a fact!"

"Certainly the button's a fact, but what does it prove? What possible connection can it have with this case?"

"I don't know," I said. "Poggioli always gets all the little facts, and later weaves them together in a quite wonderful manner so that the explanation seems to work out by itself."

"That may happen in this case," said Gebhardt drily. "I'm becoming convinced that other-

wise it may not be worked out at all."

As we went back through the entrance I insisted on stopping for a last look at the mailboxes and the button.

"I wonder if it could have been ripped off of Mr. Fanoway's sleeve," I said.

"You didn't think to look, when you were there?"

"No, I really didn't," I admitted unhappily. "I can run back now, and—"

"Don't trouble yourself," he said. "I looked. Mr. Fanoway had all his buttons."

I glanced at the guard who was sitting slumped in a wicker chair by the small telephone stand in the vestibule. He had fallen asleep, which did not surprise me too much, for he had all the earmarks of an irresponsible, self-indulgent individual.

"Was there anything else in the Fanoway box, besides the button?" I asked in an undertone. "I should have looked. It was stupid of me not to."

Gebhardt unconsciously lowered his own voice. "Two or three letters," he said. "You can see them through the grille."

"How do you know they don't contain something that would give us a lead?" I asked.

"Do you really think they might?" he asked with a derisive inflection.

"I don't know," I said. "But anything Poggioli doesn't know, he investigates thoroughly. Remember, I told you when you asked me to come with you that I'd help you all I could."

Gebhardt scowled, and then glanced cautiously at the guard again. Then he put his finger under the little steel door and lifted it open. He took the button from where it was caught inside the door and handed it to me.

"That's *your* clue," he whispered.

"Go on, run through the letters," I urged, impatiently. "Maybe we'll find something to go with the button that's a great deal more conclusive."

Gebhardt's expression became slightly amused and slightly ironic. "The next clue we find is mine," he said, and reached in for the letters.

There were almost a dozen in the box. He riffled through them and turned to me in startled incomprehension.

"A lot of these envelopes are empty," he said.

"Which ones?" I asked.

Gebhardt re-examined the entire batch. "Business envelopes from—" Here he began going through them more carefully. "From banks, industrial corporations, brokerage companies, investment houses . . . Look here," he whispered quite seriously, "this is the month when quarterly dividends are mailed out, isn't it?"

I nodded. "Do you suppose that fact had something to do with Fanoway's death?" I asked with an odd feeling that we were groping blindly in the dark.

"I don't know," he replied. "I don't see why he should have taken out the checks and put back the envelopes. I don't see why anyone would do that."

"Maybe he took the checks to the bank and meant to pick up the envelopes when he returned to his apartment."

"But he didn't pick them up," said Gebhardt, "they're still here."

"Naturally they're still here," I said. "He got shot in the meantime, remember? He probably had already drawn the money on them."

"He couldn't get into the banks so early in the morning. It's just bank time now."

"Well, don't neglect the details," I said, "that's the way Poggioli proceeds and our problem always works itself out."

Gebhardt reached into the box again. I glanced uneasily at the guard, as I was not entirely certain that we were within the law. Just then I heard Gebhardt cry out. I looked around, and saw him standing almost at my elbow with a small .25 automatic in his hand. If he had been clasping a snake I could not have been more shocked.

"You found that pistol in the box?" I whispered.

"That's right. Did you think it was mine? Shooting you would hardly make sense—just to keep this exclusive."

"Why . . . that's the weapon that killed him!"

"Of course it is."

"Maybe it isn't," I said, reconsidering. "We'd better go back and see if he was shot with a twenty-five."

"I've already looked. The wound was quite small—not ragged and gaping. A forty-five automatic even a thirty-eight seldom makes that kind of wound."

"But how did it get into his mailbox?"

"I don't know," Gebhardt said.

"Listen," I whispered, "he must have committed suicide, put the pistol in his mailbox and staggered to his apartment door."

"Why would he put it in his mailbox?"

"To make a last mystery, perhaps," I said. "To get talked about one last time. A good many politicians are hams at heart."

Gebhardt stared at the little weapon. "That's not the reason," he said. "Listen. I've got to make the afternoon edition. I don't really need to know *why* the pistol's here—not for a while anyway. Just our finding a pistol will make front page copy for two or three days!"

With that he put the gun back in the box, closed the lid, and walked out to his jalopy. I was

utterly at loose ends. Unless the lethal weapon's presence in the mailbox could be logically explained I could not share his elation.

When we arrived at the *Times* Building, Gebhardt jumped out with merely a nod to me and disappeared under the big electric clock over the entrance. I was simply left as so much waste material. I had every reason to feel embittered, because if it hadn't been for me he would never have looked in the mailboxes in the first place. I even had to pay my own taxi fare home.

The puzzle of the gun and the empty envelopes in the mailbox continued to torment me all the way to my apartment. But then, just as I paid off the driver, the whole matter straightened itself in my mind with Poggioli-like simplicity. An insane man must have shot Fanoway. That was quite obviously the reason why I had been unable to make heads or tails of the affair.

In its essence it was irrational, perhaps, but it satisfied me intellectually, if not financially. No writer can sell an irrational murder mystery. A bewildering but strictly logical dialectic is at the very core of the mystery writer's craft. I thought enviously of Gebhardt. A newspaper reporter spontaneously welcomes any phase of life without let or hindrance. The cross-section of reality he deals with doesn't have to be logical, lyrical or laughable.

He simply waits for something to happen. He makes use of it and gets paid for his pains. I could not repress the dry, wry smile of the penurious intellectual for the pampered proletariat.

As I walked into our living-room on 23 Acacia Street, Poggioli glanced up at me, with almost genial solicitude, and asked me how I had made out with *my* political crime story.

"It was a murder, just as Gebhardt reported," I told him. "But it was not a political crime. In a strict sense, it wasn't a crime at all."

Poggioli honored my paradox by lifting his brows and reflecting for a moment. "Oh, you mean the murderer was insane."

I was struck dumb for a moment. Then my astonishment abated a little, and I shrugged off what I should have taken for granted—Poggioli's amazing perspicacity.

I was still resentful because Gebhardt had not even had the courtesy to bring me home in his car after I had presented him with an exceptionally fine newspaper story.

"Wait a moment," said Poggioli, "I hope you're not forgetting you voluntarily started out to investigate a political crime?"

"Why should I want to forget it?" I countered.

"And you found instead it was the work of a maniac?"

"That's what I found."

"Well, how can you draw any hard and fast lines between insanity and politics?"

He was being funny in his elephantine fashion and I was in no mood for it.

"Poggioli," I said, "I've had an exhausting, disappointing day and I've no intention of standing here splitting hairs with you."

He chuckled wryly.

"You are bitterly disappointed because you can't convincingly write up a murder mystery involving a crazy man?"

"That's right," I said.

"Couldn't you make it a simple blood-and-dark-drapery horror tale?"

"I am not a simple writer, Poggioli," I said with dignity. "I always adhere to a bewildering, paradoxical but intrinsically exact logic, and that is what my readers have come to expect of me."

"Mmm—mmm . . . I see. What's that you've got in your hands?"

I lowered my eyes. I hadn't known I had anything in my hands. "A button," I said.

"Really? Is it connected with your maniac somehow?"

A vague sort of apprehension went through me. I didn't want Poggioli's help with this problem. I was determined to solve it entirely on my own.

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"Because you are nervously playing with it, passing it from one hand to the other. You are very uncertain about something. Since you are thinking about this 'maniac' of yours, he must be the reason for your agitation. You don't really believe he *is* a maniac. You're taking refuge in rationalization because you are up a stump and don't want to admit it to yourself."

I really felt miserable. I couldn't deny the truth of his statement. My first effort to go out and solve a murder case all by myself, after countless years of apprenticeship to Poggioli, had ended in complete failure. I would never in the world be an autonomous mystery story writer. I would always have to depend on somebody else.

"Precisely where did you get the button?" asked Poggioli.

"Out of a mailbox," I said flatly.

"Out of the mailbox of the murdered man!" demanded the criminologist.

He seemed just about to unravel the mystery and I felt a completely irrational objection to his doing so.

"Let me see the button," said Poggioli.

I handed it to him, still in the grip of a senseless reluctance. He

took it and examined it painstakingly, turning it over and over on his palm. I wondered if he would suddenly start questioning me about the empty envelopes and the gun.

I was afraid, from just one button, that Poggioli would deduce more about the crime than I had been able to discover by examining the mailbox, the corpse, the old woman and the whole apartment building. He did not, however, build a structure of deductive logic linking the button with the envelopes and the gun.

"This is a sleeve button," he said.

"Is it?"

"Yes. It was torn off a very expensive suit of Scottish wool tailored in London."

Somehow I was glad his line of thought appeared to be veering away from the murder.

"The man who wore this," he continued, "was a very expensive, but conservative dresser. A bit more ostentatious than a banker, but more subdued than a salesman. It could easily come from the coat of a very dignified politician."

"Where did you say the button came from?" I asked.

"Off his sleeve."

I thought I saw a gap in Poggioli's logic.

"It's odd," I said, "that such a well-dressed man should allow a sleeve button to work loose and fall off."

"It didn't work loose and fall off," said Poggioli. "It was snapped off with great force. The threads in it are torn—not worn."

That threw my entire theory out of focus. I had assumed that Fanoway had dropped one of his buttons, picked it up, and put it in his mailbox, meaning to retrieve it when he returned home.

Poggioli seemed to read my thoughts. "The murdered man, Fanoway— Was he a careful dresser, or did you forget to observe that point?"

"No, he wore very ordinary clothes," I said.

"Then he hadn't lost a coat sleeve button?"

"Gebhardt made sure of that when he examined the corpse."

"I'm glad Gebhardt took the trouble to look, although I was virtually certain the button didn't belong to Fanoway."

"Poggioli," I ejaculated, "how can you be so sure?"

"Because the Bayview Apartments are very old-fashioned and a man who lived there wouldn't be likely to wear modish, imported English clothes. You didn't notice anything else of importance, did you?"

"Poggioli," I said, "I'm nervous and overwrought now. I'm going to my room to lie down. When I've rested and feel cap-

able of taking up the problem, I really want you to help me."

He made a gesture of acquiescence. "Oh, all right. It may not be much of a mystery anyway. Politicians more or less run true to form." And he put the button in his pocket.

I went to my room disappointed and disgusted with myself. The simplicity with which Poggioli had demonstrated that the button could have had no connection with Fanoway irked me. Why had I failed to think of so obvious an explanation?

I tardily reconstructed my own theory. A well-dressed man had somehow snapped off a button. For safe keeping he had picked it up and put it in Fanoway's box. He had pushed it in the grille from the inside so it would be clearly visible and not fall out. He did so with the intention of returning and retrieving it again later. The only reason he used Fanoway's box was because it was unlocked, and hence highly convenient.

The painful part to me was that the plot, the dramatic involution that is absolutely essential to a good mystery story, did not exist. Poggioli had wiped it all out with a mere glance at the button.

I toyed with the idea of starting from scratch and inventing a completely new story, one in which a succession of surprises *did* hang together in an ever-mounting crescendo until it culminated in an unforgettable climax. My mental perturbation became so great that I lost consciousness.

I suppose Poggioli in his disparaging way would have said that my brain stopped functioning and I went to sleep. In any event, I did not wake up all that afternoon, and indeed not until almost nine o'clock the following morning.

I might well have continued on as one of the Seven Sleepers, if it had not been for Poggioli shaking me sharply awake.

"Do you know anything about this?" he demanded rattling a paper in front of my face.

"About what?" I asked, struggling dazedly to sit up.

He smacked the paper with the back of his fingers, and I read the streamer headlines:

Mailbox Thief Murders City Councilman Fanoway.

Killer, Jake Flippo, Hides Pistol in Fanoway's Letter Box.

Evidence indicates slain councilman surprised thief looting box when Flippo shot him.

Slayer had removed dividend checks, leaving only empty envelopes. Stolen checks later found on Flippo's person.

Bill Gebhardt, Times *reporter, summoned police and developed Flippo's fingerprints on pistol. Flippo arrested in afternoon of*

day he committed crime. Admits he stole checks but denies murder. Trial at City Criminal Court at twelve o'clock.

When I read Gebhardt's masterly summary of the mystery, done in such short crisp paragraphs, my admiration for the fellow mounted.

"Poggioli," I exclaimed excitedly, "that's a marvelous solution to the mystery. Gebhardt is just about as good as you are!" I couldn't have said a more unfortunate thing.

Poggioli cried angrily: "Solution to the mystery! Haven't you enough elementary discernment to see that the 'solution' was planned?"

"You mean— Gebhardt planned it?"

"Certainly not. The man who killed Fanoway planned it. He wanted the police to make this discovery and arrest some mail thief, or other. The thief just happened to be Flippo!"

That *really* startled me.

"Then Flippo *didn't* kill Fanoway—even though his fingerprints were on the gun?"

"Certainly not," Poggioli replied. "Flippo's innocent, I'm telling you. I suppose you knew about that pistol in the mailbox all this time?"

"Yes I did," I told him.

"Imagine that! The pistol *explains* the button. You've caused me to spend a sleepless night trying to solve the mystery of the button!"

"Oh, that," I said. "I've an explanation for that. Some well-dressed man simply picked the button up when it snapped off his sleeve and put it in the mailbox until he could return for it on his way home from work. He used Fanoway's box because it just happened to be open. I'm convinced now that the button has nothing to do with the murder."

Poggioli looked at me both pityingly, and with undisguised contempt. "The button and the pistol form the plainest possible signposts pointing out the murderer. The question now is—simply to pick him out."

"You're *sure* it wasn't Flippo?" I stammered.

Poggioli made a hopeless gesture. "A mailbox thief kill Fanoway! Did you ever hear of a sneak thief carrying a gun and shooting anybody? If a man has spirit enough to kill, he has spirit enough to go in for big hauls. He wouldn't stoop to filching checks from a mailbox and putting their envelopes back."

I hated to give up Gebhardt's idea. I made a desperate, last try. "Couldn't there possibly be a many-sided genius of a criminal who could do both?"

Poggioli came to a pause, staring hard at me. "Did you and Gebhardt think to go through every part of the dead man's

apartment, while you were there?"

"Yes, we did. The guard stopped us and asked if I were you. When we replied in the negative he let us go on."

Poggioli laughed briefly. "How transparent. The whole plot is childishly simple. But the question still remains, which one of them did it."

I realized Gebhardt's fine solution was being demolished brick by brick. "That's usually the question in a murder mystery isn't it . . . who did it?" I said.

Poggioli paid no attention to this although my question was logical.

"In the dead man's apartment," Poggioli went on, "what did you find out?"

I tried hard to remember. "That Fanoway was a lover of beauty," I said, after a moment's thought.

"And how did you discover that?" Poggioli asked.

"From the original painting on his wall of 'The Death of General Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn,' " I told him.

Poggioli stared at me. "You mean the actual original of all those prints we used to see in saloons?"

"That's right. At least, it didn't look like a reproduction."

"How did anyone come to mention beauty in connection with that painting."

"The elderly housekeeper, who was sitting in the apartment, mentioned it," I told him.

"Then *you* must have said something about beauty. I'm sure that in the midst of the excitement and horror of a murder the old woman didn't begin lecturing about the pictures on the wall."

"Well, as I recall it, she said that Mr. Fanoway was a great lover of beauty, and then she pointed out that particular picture."

Poggioli became hopeless. "But exactly how and why did beauty come up in the first place?" he pleaded.

It is extremely difficult to recall conversations backwards. It's like trying to repeat the alphabet in reverse.

"Oh, yes," I said, after a pause. "To comfort her I mentioned that Mr. Fanoway had a very beautiful view out of his window."

"Then what? Try to remember everything that was said."

"Then the old woman remarked that Mr. Fanoway tried to keep it like that."

"She remarked what?" Poggioli asked.

"That Mr. Fanoway tried to keep the bay looking beautiful. Then Gebhardt said—"

"Didn't that strike you as being an amazing and pregnant statement?" he interrupted. "Didn't it?"

"Why-y . . . no. It didn't

strike me that way particularly. I remember Gebhardt did ask her how Fanoway could keep the bay beautiful, and the old woman replied that he stood up for it. Gebhardt asked how a man could stand up for the beauty of a bay. The old woman replied that he loved and protected all sorts of beauty, and then she showed us the 'Death of General Custer' which he'd rescued from a junk shop."

"And you two dropped the subject of Fanoway's defense of the beauty of the bay?"

The harshness in Poggioli's voice made me feel a little incompetent.

"I'm afraid we did. From there on out we discussed the 'Death of General Custer.' "

Poggioli drew a long breath. "It's at least helpful to know the motive of the murder. Now I won't have to depend entirely upon this button to identify the criminal."

My head, figuratively speaking, went round and round. Here I was, at this late date, off on a completely new and unknown tangent after Gebhardt really had nailed down an excellent solution. I realized with the darkest forebodings that the new track might throw me off entirely.

Poggioli would tell me nothing further. He was too thoroughly disgusted with me and Gebhardt and when I asked him what he was going to do he said only that he would attend Flippo's trial at twelve o'clock and liberate an innocent thief.

Beyond that, he apparently meant to do nothing. In despair I watched him turn back to our morning *Times* and began reading it to try to find some crime of the day of sufficient interest to hold his attention.

I must admit I was utterly torn up over his attitude, for I am a conscientious writer. If I do not believe my story to be solidly grounded in a bedrock of verifiable facts, I simply cannot write it at all. I resolved to go to the prisoner in the city jail, interview him and see what he had to say about the crime.

Of course, I expected him to stoutly protest his innocence but I hoped, with my mind trained in psychological analysis by long association with Poggioli, that I would be able to winnow out the truth from whatever he might choose to tell me.

When—a half hour after I'd made my decision— I was admitted to Flippo's cell in the top story of Tiamara's skyscraper jail, the prisoner naturally did deny his guilt, emphatically. He was a smallish, dried-up little man and looked pathetic sitting on the edge of his bunk.

I talked to him outside his bars. I told him that I was a professional writer and would like to know, man to man, why he had shot Mark Fanoway.

I put it to him with extreme candor, hoping he would slip into a confession unthinkingly, in an effort to boast, and justify himself.

He must have seen through me because he protested at once that he not only hadn't murdered Mr. Fanoway, but had never even met the man. How could I think him guilty?

"I know," I pointed out. "But if you were robbing his mailbox and he came out and caught you in the act, you'd probably murder him without an introduction."

His defense was precisely what Poggioli had already indicated to me that it would be. "Me shoot a patron!" he said. "I am a mailbox operator. I never carried a gun in my life, as that would automatically up my sentence to the penitentiary. I'd as soon carry a snake in my pocket.

"Besides that, I do no man any harm, even in my work. Why should I put a sin on my conscience by murder? When I'm caught, and occasionally I am caught, I talk my way out. I say, 'Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm in the wrong box.' "

I got interested in the fellow. He seemed a very honest person. "Look here," I said, "you say you do no man any harm. But you go through his mail, take out his checks and cash them?"

"That annoys him, yes," admitted Mr. Flippo, "but it doesn't harm him financially. He can have his check duplicated by writing to the company that issues it. I cash them usually in some department store during the rush hour. When my signature comes back to the company as forged, they lose nothing because they are insured against bad checks. When the check finally turns up at the insurance office and gets paid off, they lose nothing because they expect that in their business.

"As insurance men, they know approximately how many bad checks they will have to pay off each year and arrange their insurance rates to make a profit on the year's transactions. I'm simply a cog in the commercial machinery of our nation. If I, and everybody like me should go on a strike, it would throw thousands of men out of employment."

I saw Mr. Flippo was to all intents and purposes a conventional businessman. But there was a mystery about him.

"Mr. Flippo," I said, "how do you account for that gun in Fanoway's mailbox with your fingerprints on it?"

The mailbox operator wet his lips. "That gun, sir, was in the box when I opened it. I was getting out the small checks, opening the envelopes and picking them out. I never take a check for over a hundred dollars, for that would be grand larceny and

get me into serious trouble. That was all I was doing, going on with my regular business, harming nobody, when I reached in and touched this gun.

"It nearly scared me to death. I thought, *This is a trap!* But then I thought again, how could it be a trap? I figured some night watchman had stashed his gun in the mailbox and would pick it up again when he went to work in the evening. The only reason in the world my fingerprints are on that gun is because I had to pull it out before I saw what it was."

Well, Gebhardt's story was thoroughly punctured, just as I feared it would be. Now I had no ending at all unless I could worm the truth out of Poggioli and I knew he wouldn't tell me after I had told him that Gebhardt was as good a criminologist as he was. I felt sorry for myself and sorry for Flippo who had got arrested in his somewhat unconventional trade.

I said to him, "Well, Mr. Flippo, you'll come out all right."

"What makes you say that?" he asked in surprise.

"Did you ever hear of Dr. Henry Poggioli who used to lecture on criminology at the Ohio State University?"

"Who hasn't, sir? I have studied many of his cases in the magazines—always with an eye to improving my own style."

"I'm the man who writes up the accounts of his cases," I said.

Mr. Flippo was overcome. "Imagine me talking to such a man . . . and in a place like this." He made a gesture of apology for his condition, got up, came over and shook hands with me through the bars.

"Why do you say I'll come out all right?" he asked gripping my hand.

"Because I heard Poggioli say that you had not done this murder, that your psychology was not the homicidal type and that he was going to see to it that you got out of the murder charge."

"Praise be," said Flippo, "this comes of leading a proper life. Help comes to you in the most unexpected ways."

Just a few minutes later the jailer came to take Flippo to the criminal court on the sixth floor. I went along with them.

It turned out that the case was up by the time we reached the court room. Several councilmen were in court to see that the murderer of their colleague got condign punishment.

Poggioli moved among them looking from one to the other. I hadn't the faintest idea what he was looking for. Finally he nodded to one of them to follow him into the anteroom. I went with them—hoping, but not really expecting to hear something that would help me on my story.

Poggioli introduced himself

and said, "You are Councilman Collyman? I hope you'll excuse me for breaking in like this, but you're in the real estate business?" Collyman said he was. Poggioli went on, "I'm looking for a water-front building lot. I wondered if you had any?"

Mr. Collyman considered. "How soon do you want this lot, Mr. Poggioli?"

"No particular date. I just want one eventually."

"Mmm-mmm. Now my company is about to make a development in the bay, Mr. Poggioli, a small real estate development, a fill-in of about five hundred acres. It won't take us too long. We'll get the authorization when our board meets next Thursday afternoon."

"Very good, I'll wait for you," Poggioli promised. "You and your company are fortunate in being able to add these improvements to our city."

"I think so, too," Collyman replied. "Of course there was some opposition to it. Aesthetics before utility, you know. But that's not American. Well, it's overcome now."

"Very good. By the way Mr. Collyman, you have political influence here in Tiamara?"

"Mmm-mmm . . . some."

"I wondered if you would help me nolle pros the murder charge against the little mailbox thief up before the court?"

"I help?"

"Yes, if you want to see justice done."

"But this man Flippo murdered my colleague, Mark Fanoway! If ever a man deserved to hang—"

Poggioli held up a hand. "No, this man didn't. The actual murderer is still at large, Mr. Collyman, and who he is is a complete mystery. And he will never be discovered. He executed one of the most clever crimes I have ever known.

"He put on gloves, shot Fanoway, and hid his pistol in Fanoway's mailbox. That alone is clever. But he didn't stop there. This unknown man knew it was the end of the financial quarter of the year when mailboxes were full of dividend checks.

"He reasoned correctly that some mailbox thief would come around and steal these checks. If no thief came the mystery of the gun in the box was still insoluble. But if a thief did appear and touch the gun, then his fingerprints, don't you see, would be on the gun, and the thief convicted for murder."

"Mr. Poggioli, that's the most amazing theory I ever . . ."

"Isn't it? And the most brilliant. But unfortunately, one little accident left . . . I won't say a clue, but a sign of the real murderer. When he pushed his pistol into the box, a button from his sleeve hung in the grille on the inside of the lock

box door and snapped off. I have it with me."

Poggioli showed the button, then went on. "You see in the murderer's excitement, he never felt his button hang and jerk off. It couldn't be Flippo's button. It came off of an imported English suit made of Scottish wool.

"Flippo never wore such clothes as that in his life. So it wasn't Flippo. That little man merely touched the pistol, then fled—with his checks, of course." Poggioli smiled at an inner vision of the little man fleeing with the checks. "Now I am sure that you, as a public servant, will be glad to quash the murder charge against an innocent man and let him go. As to who did it, that, no doubt, will never be known."

Mr. Collyman moistened his lips. "If what you say is true, Mr. Poggioli, I will do my duty as a councilman, of course."

"Thank you, I knew you would. I don't know this Flippo. I never met him, I just wanted abstract justice done."

As I followed Poggioli out into the hallway toward the elevator bank I asked him how he had picked out Collyman. Four of the board were real estate men and it could have been anyone of them, I thought.

"Easily enough," said Poggioli. "Collyman wore an English suit, made of Scottish wool, but it had a new set of American buttons on its sleeves."

The current issue of THE SAINT'S *companion magazine,* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *now on sale, features an astounding short novel of the future by Irving S. Cox, Jr.*—THE CARTELS JUNGLE. *And soaring with it on Icarian sandals is a star-bright Algis Budrys story,* THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY. *The title is significant because it confirms what a multitude of readers already know—that* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *is an undiscovered country with each new issue, as beckoning vistas demanding instant exploration by mystery lovers everywhere. And waiting to assist you are such brilliant guides as Walt Sheldon, Carl Jacobi, Charles Eric Maine, Walter M. Miller, Jr., and many others.*

the unloaded gun

by . . . Edmund Crispin

A murder weapon has to be loaded with precision and cunning. And thereby hangs a tale — and a police officer's cherished sanity.

"IN MY JOB," said Detective-Inspector Humbleby, "a man expects to be shot at every now and again. It's an occupational risk, like pneumoconiosis in coal-mining. When you're on duty you've got to be prepared for it to crop up. But a social call on an old friend is quite a different matter.

"Here am I on my Sabbatical. I drop in to see this man I've known ever since the first war. And what happens? Before I have a chance to as much as open my mouth and ask how he is, he snatches a revolver out of his pocket and fires pointblank at me. Well, I was petrified. Anyone would be under the circumstances. I was so astonished I literally couldn't move."

"He doesn't seem to have hit you, though." From the depths of the armchair in his rooms at St. Christopher's, Gervase Fen, University Professor of English Language and Literature, regarded his guest with a clinical air.

Famed detective story expert James Sandoe has pointed out that the name Crispin—the patron saint of shoemakers—occurs in Henry V because the battle of Agincourt—perhaps the most decisive in history—was fought on that day. This may help to explain why Edmund Crispin is one of the most illustrious of British mystery writers, with such best-selling novels as OBSEQUIES AT OXFORD *and* HOLY DISORDERS *to his credit. But we rather suspect that the mystery of a fertile creativeness transcends all legends and historical surmises, as this brilliantly plotted yarn so amply attests.*

"I see no wound," he elaborated.

"There is no wound. Three times he fired," said Humbleby dramatically, "and three times he missed. Which, of course, makes it all the odder."

"Why 'of course'? I've always understood that revolvers—"

"I say 'of course' because Garstin-Walsh, whom I'm speaking of, is a retired army man: a brevet-rank colonel, to be precise . . . But perhaps I'd better begin at the beginning."

Fen nodded gravely. "Perhaps you had."

"As you know," said Humbleby, "I was in Military Intelligence during the war, and it was while I was investigating an unimaginative piece of sabotage at an arms depot near Loos that I first met Garstin-Walsh, who at that time was a captain in the Supply Corps. It'd be an exaggeration to say that we became really close friends. But we did get on well together, and when the war ended we kept up a sporadic correspondence and managed to meet once or twice every year.

"Then eighteen months ago he retired and went to live at a village called Uscombe, which is a few miles from Exeter. Since I was staying with my sister at Exmouth, and hadn't seen him for some time, I decided, the day before yesterday, to drive over and pay him a surprise visit.

"Well, I left Exmouth immediately after breakfast and got to Uscombe about ten-thirty. Garstin-Walsh's house, a nice little place, is on the outskirts of the village, and although I had never been there before, I had no difficulty in finding it. Then the trouble started. The painters were doing over the house, for one thing, and for another, an Exeter C.I.D. inspector was hanging about the hall. What was even more disturbing, an undeniably dead body was in process of being removed by a mortuary van.

"You can be sure that if I had known about all this I would have gone back to Exmouth and tried again some other day. But by the time the situation became clear I'd rung the doorbell, and been let in by the housekeeper. So it goes without saying that I couldn't very well escape without offending the man I'd come to see.

"Garstin-Walsh was still upstairs dressing. But the Exeter man, Jourdain he was called, had heard me give my name to the housekeeper and lost no time in introducing himself. 'You'll be curious,' he said dogmatically, 'about the body they've just taken away.' I denied this, but I might as well have nodded, for he insisted on telling me about the affair just the same. Stripped of its inessentials, the story I heard while we waited in the

hall for Garstin-Walsh to come down, was as follows:

"A year previously the tumble-down cottage near Garstin-Walsh's house had been rented by one Saul Brebner, the unfortunate man whose remains were at present *en route* for the Exeter City Mortuary. A powerful, malignant, drunken, slovenly man of about fifty he was, and the people of Uscombe took an instinctive dislike to him almost from the day of his arrival.

"He had no family, and he lived alone in squalor. Yet he always seemed to be well supplied with money, and he divided his time fairly evenly between poaching and The Three Crowns. The police kept a sharp eye on him, of course. But he succeeded in steering clear of them. The only person in the village who ever had a good word to say for him was, surprisingly enough, Garstin-Walsh."

Humbleby nodded.

"That there was a reason for this the village soon discovered. Brebner had been Garstin-Walsh's batman in the first war, and it was realized that Garstin-Walsh's toleration of the rascal derived from this. However, the toleration was the opposite of mutual. Brebner made no secret of his loathing for Garstin-Walsh, and from time to time, when he'd been drinking heavily, he was heard to hint that there were aspects of the colonel's career which would not bear close investigation.

"The village, which liked Garstin-Walsh, discounted these innuendoes as springing solely from malice, and even when Brebner became more specific, referring to misappropriation of supplies in France, refused to take him seriously. Indeed, on the night of the incident which wrote *finis* to Brebner's disreputable existence, he was so vituperative about Garstin-Walsh in the public bar of The Three Crowns that there was very nearly a riot, and when he left the pub at closing time—ten-thirty or thereabouts—he was as dangerously enraged as he was dangerously drunk.

"Garstin-Walsh reached home that evening at about a quarter to eleven. He'd spent the day acting as starter at the village sports, and we know that he later dined at the vicarage, and worked with the vicar at the parish accounts. He got back to his house just in time to meet his solicitor on the doorstep, the latter having driven there, on urgent business, from Exeter.

"They immediately went into the study, a large room on the ground floor, and discussed whatever it was they had to discuss. And, according to the solicitor, a respectable old gentleman named Weems, it was exactly five to eleven when the French windows burst open and

Brebner, carrying a double-barreled shotgun, lurched into the room.

"It was all over in a moment. Brebner leveled the gun at Garstin-Walsh and fired off one barrel. But he was hopelessly intoxicated, and the pellets spattered the room without touching their target. The second barrel remained. Steadying himself, Brebner aimed again, and Garstin-Walsh, grabbing up the pistol which he'd been using all day to start races, and had reloaded immediately on his return, fired just in time to save his own life.

"It was good shooting, partly because the end of the room where Brebner stood was in semi-darkness, and partly because Garstin-Walsh, according to Weems' statement to the police, was thoroughly unnerved. Brebner staggered, dropped the shotgun and collapsed on the carpet with a bullet in his head.

"Well, the village constable was summoned; and since Brebner, though unconscious, was still just alive a doctor was summoned, too. The doctor refused to have Brebner moved, and Garstin-Walsh was forced to allow him to stay in the study, with a nurse to look after him, until next morning at nine o'clock. He died there without recovering consciousness."

Humbleby sucked complacently at his cigar. "That was the story Jourdain told me while we waited for Garstin-Walsh to appear. It appeared to be a clear case of self-defense, and Jourdain's only reason for being there was to have a look at the study where the tragedy had occurred, preparatory to making the usual routine-report. He'd just finished his tale when Garstin-Walsh came downstairs.

"My friend looked haggard and white, and I was pretty sure he hadn't slept much. But he brushed aside my suggestion that I should go away and come back at some more convenient time, and took us both into the study as soon as the nurse, who had been packing and tidying up, quitted it. It was a pleasant room, its attractiveness a bit marred, at the moment, by surgical smells and paint smells.

"While Jourdain explained that he'd come to look at the bullet-holes and so forth—rather needlessly, since he'd discussed the reason for his presence with the housekeeper, and she, presumably, had conveyed it to Garstin-Walsh— I walked over to the French windows to have a look at the view.

"And that was when it happened.

"The village constable hadn't confiscated Garstin-Walsh's revolver—there was no reason, after all, why he should—and apparently Garstin-Walsh had taken it to bed with him. Any-

way, he had it on him now, in a pocket of his dressing-gown, and I was just on the point of making some fatuous remark about the garden when he suddenly whipped the weapon out, shouting incoherently, and fired it at me.

"I was simply petrified, as I've said. I stood there helplessly trying to remember the details of Gross's suicidal method of disarming people with guns, and Jourdain just stood there staring, his eyes wide with horror. One shot smashed a vase on a table beside me, and another smashed a pane of the French windows, and a third went heaven knows where. And then, when I thought my last hour had come, Garstin-Walsh waved me away—still shouting, still incoherent—and backed out of the French windows and fled.

"Almost immediately Jourdain went after him—and to cut a long story short, caught up with him at the bottom of the garden, where he'd stopped and was standing like a man in a trance, staring at the revolver in his hand as if he couldn't imagine what it was, or how he'd come by it.

"He surrendered it, and returned to the house with Jourdain, looking dazed and muttering bewilderedly to himself. He knew what he'd done, all right. But he could give no rational explanation for his behavior. 'It—it was like last night,' he stammered. 'When I saw you standing by those windows I remembered Brebner, and the gun was in my pocket, and—'

"Well, it wasn't attempted murder, because there was plainly no malice; and there's no such thing as attempted manslaughter. So we telephoned his doctor and got him to bed, still wildly confused—and in bed, for all I know, he is still. The doctor, of course, understood all about it. It was delayed shock, or post-traumatic automatism or some such thing.

"The only surprising feature of the business was that I was still alive. I can assure you I was heartily ashamed of myself for upsetting what otherwise would have been a phenomenal case history for the medical textbooks . . . Well, I went away, and today, as you know, traveled up here to Oxford, and—"

"Why?" Fen interrupted. "Why did you come to Oxford? To see me?"

"Well, yes."

"You're not satisfied, then?"

"I'm not," said Humbleby slowly. "Everything about the affair fits and is quite innocent, excepting just one thing."

"And what is that?"

"He unloaded the gun, you see. After he'd shot at me, and before Jourdain grabbed him, he unloaded the gun and threw the spent shells away somewhere.

When he handed the gun to Jourdain its chambers were empty. And why, in the name of all that's logical, should he have done *that?*"

For a moment Fen did not reply. His ruddy, clean-shaven face was pensive and his long, lean body sprawled gracelessly in the chair. His brown hair, ineffectually plastered down with water, stood up, as usual, in mutinous spikes at the crown of his head. Presently, lighting a cigarette, he said: "And were the spent cartridges ever found?"

"No. At the time, of course, we didn't give them much thought. But Jourdain was hunting for them yesterday, and he couldn't find them anywhere."

Fen appeared mildly amused, "And he never will, I imagine—unless your Colonel Garstin-Walsh is a hopeless blunderer."

"But how are they important? I don't see—"

"Don't you?" Fen smiled. "I should imagine, myself, that they're important simply because one of them is a blank."

"A blank?" Humbleby's face was very much that.

And Fen roused himself, speaking more energetically. "You'll agree that Garstin-Walsh obviously possessed blanks. No man in his senses starts races at the village sports with live ammunition."

"Yes, I agree about that," Humbleby said. "But why on earth should he fire two live shots and a blank at me? No, wait a minute. Was it because—"

"Yes. It was because Jourdain was just about to examine the study and Garstin-Walsh had to account for a bullet-hole in the wall.

"That bullet-hole wasn't there before the Brebner shooting. If it had been, the painters would have found it and repaired it. So what would have happened if Garstin-Walsh hadn't staged his shooting act with you? Jourdain, finding the hole, would have reasoned thus: 'This hole *must* be the result of the single shot Garstin-Walsh fired at Brebner last night. It can't have been made subsequently, because Brebner and the nurse were in here all night. Therefore when Garstin-Walsh fired at Brebner he missed. *But* there is a bullet from Garstin-Walsh's revolver lodged in Brebner's skull. Therefore Garstin-Walsh must have shot Brebner earlier on, before he returned here and met Weems. And that doesn't look much like self-defense. It looks like murder.'

"It's obvious, surely, that Brebner was blackmailing Garstin-Walsh and that Garstin-Walsh decided he must put a stop to it. So he shot Brebner after Brebner left The Three Crowns, went to the cottage to remove whatever evidence of misappropriation of army sup-

plies Brebner was using, and then returned to his house. He'd shot Brebner in the skull, and so naturally assumed that he was dead, but—"

"Naturally," Humbleby interposed with some warmth. "And if you'll kindly explain how a man with a bullet in his brain can go rushing about with a shotgun intent on vengeance. I'm prepared to listen."

"Oh, come, Humbleby." Fen was shocked. "It's not common, I grant you. But there are plenty of cases on record. John Wilkes Booth, who assassinated Lincoln, is one. Gross and Taylor and Sydney Smith quote others. Brain injuries don't always kill at once, and in a certain proportion of cases they don't kill at all.

"But Garstin-Walsh must have had a nasty shock when the man he'd left for dead burst in at his French windows. No wonder he was thoroughly unnerved. No wonder his shot went wild. But no wonder, also, that Brebner could hardly hold the shotgun with which he intended to revenge himself, and collapsed just after Garstin-Walsh fired at him. Garstin-Walsh must have rejoiced. He'd murdered a man, and now, by the queerest imaginable combination of accidents, the thing had been made to seem a perfect case of self-defense.

"The only snag lay in that superfluous, that tell-tale bullet hole in the study wall. In the excitement following Brebner's collapse it would not be noticed —particularly if a piece of furniture were unobtrusively shifted so as to conceal it. But there was no chance during the night of removing the bullet and plugging the hole, and very little chance that Jourdain would miss it when he examined the study the next morning. So Garstin-Walsh loaded his revolver with two live cartridges and a blank. Then—you having placed yourself conveniently in position near the French windows and the bullet-hole—he staged his nervous breakdown."

There was a long silence. Then Humbleby said, "Yes, I'm sure you're right. But it's all conjecture, of course. Unless we find those spent cartridges we haven't a shred of proof."

"Not a shred," said Fen cheerfully. "And I can't say the thought depresses me very much. It's deplorable, of course, that any murderer should go free. But in my opinion there's every likelihood of such injustices being rectified at a higher court. For a policeman on his Sabbatical—help yourself to more whiskey—what better sermon could you ask for than that?"

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